

POLITICAL IDEOLOGY: PERSPECTIVES FROM THE BIBLE

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DECLARATION

I, the undersigned, hereby declare that the work contained in this assignment is my own original work and that I have not previously in its entirety or in part submitted it at any university for a degree.

ABSTRACT

Modern society is plagued by an intense conflict of political ideologies. These conflicts in many instances reflect very serious religious overtones. Each person or group claims the right to react to socio-political issues on the basis of their own worldviews that are shaped by their cultural backgrounds, religious belief systems and political ideals. Human diversity serve to complicate matters even more and has in many instances found expression in political and religious intolerance, a fact testified to by the large-scale abuse of human rights that took place with increased intensity in the 20th century. Many Christians have failed to challenge the injustices that have resulted from these political ideologies and have instead opted to become 'apolitical' or simply hiding behind the argument that politics and religion does not mix. The author through a careful study of biblical political structures in the ancient Near East attempts to demonstrate the extent to which political ideologies of communities were influenced by the cultural milieu within which they existed. The feelings of ambivalence we experience in our faith are a direct result of these influences. An understanding of political ideology from a biblical perspective is essential to understand current world conflicts especially those that relate to the Middle East region. The author also argues for a reconciliation of politics and religion in the collective psyche of Christians. This would enhance a sense of socio-political responsibility in terms of the biblical mandate. The responsibility of government structures in terms of this mandate is also important and needs to be emphasised. The primary responsibility of any government is the welfare of its citizens and the management of public resources in an orderly, moral and efficient manner. A large percentage of government officials find it extremely difficult to face up to the challenge. The perspectives presented not only gives one insight into the historical development of biblical political worldviews, but presents us with challenges to pursue opportunities for peace and justice that would recognise and advance human dignity, human equality and human responsibility.

OPSOMMING

Die moderne samelewing is oorweldig deur konflikte van politieke ideologies. Hierdie konflikte is in baie gevalle 'n weerspieëling van baie ernstige godsdienstige motiewe. Elke persoon of groep behou hom die reg voor om te reageer op socio-politiese aangeleenthede op grond van 'n eie wêreldsiening wat geskep word deur kulturele agtergronde, godsdienstige geloofstelsels en politieke ideale. Menslike verskeidenheid maak hierdie aangeleenthede meer ingewikkeld en het in baie gevalle gelei na politieke en godsdienstige onverdraagsaamheid. Dit het verder aanleiding gegee tot die grootskaalse menseregte skendings wat plaasgevind het met groter intensiteit gedurende die 20ste eeu. Vele Christene het nie daarin geslaag om die uitdagings van ongeregtighede, wat voortspruit uit hierdie politieke ideologieë, die hoof te bied nie en het verkies om of hulself as 'apolities' te verklaar of om te argumenteer dat politiek en die godsdiens nie bymekaar hoort nie. Die skrywer, deur 'n indringende studie van bybelse politieke strukture van die ou Nabye Ooste te onderneem, poog om te demonstreer dat politiek ideologies gekleur was deur die kulturele samestelling van die gemeenskap. Gevoelens van ambivalensie wat ons ervaar in ons geloof is regstreeks as gevolg van hierdie omstandighede. Politieke ideologie vanuit 'n bybelse perspektief gee vir ons die geleentheid om huidige wêreldkonflikte beter te verstaan veral dit wat betrekking het op die Midde Ooste streek. Die skrywer stel ook voor die versoening van politiek en die godsdiens in die kollektiewe psige van Christene. As gevolg hiervan word die socio-politiese verantwoordelikheid van die Christen verhef in lyn met die bybelse mandaat. Die verantwoordelikheid van regerings strukture in terme van hierdie mandaat is ook belangrik en behoort beklemtoon word. Die primêre doel van enige regering is die welvaart van sy burgers sowel as die bestuur van sy openbare hulpbronne op 'n ordelike, sedelike en doeltreffende manier. 'n Groot aantal regeringsbeamptes vind dit moeilik om hierdie uitdaging die hoof te bied. Hierdie perspektiewe, wat hier aangebied word, gee nie net vir ons insig tot die historiese ontwikkeling van bybelse politieke wêreldsieninge nie, maar daag ons uit om geleenthede vir vrede en geregtigheid wat menslike waardigheid, menslike gelykheid en menslike verantwoordelikheid erken, na te jag.

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1. Introduction

September 11, 2001 has left an indelible mark on the world. The world watched and listened in awe as its destiny was dramatically reshaped. Reshaped in the sense that things would never be the same again. The loss of almost 3000 lives at a moment of impact has suddenly catapulted the conflict between political ideologies into a whole new dimension. The democratic world has been struck a near fatal blow right in its heart. It is not the visible sight of witnessing so many people die in such a dramatic fashion that is shocking, but more so the level of hatred and intense evil that resides in the heart of humanity. John Stott in his book, *New Issues facing Christians Today*, records some of the most serious violations of human rights in the twentieth century (1999: 166, 167). The world has witnessed Hitler's massive extermination of six million Jews and on the African continent, Rwanda's tribal conflict in 1974 resulted in the massacre of half a million people from the Tutsi tribe. Sixty five million Russians are believed to have been killed by their own leaders after 1923 while around three million Cambodians died of disease, starvation or execution at the hands of Pol Pot and the Khmer Rouge between 1975 and 1979. Around a million people died in Ethiopia between 1983 and 1985 with almost three million people displaced. Radovan Karadjic and Ratko Mladic, two notorious Bosnian Serb leaders are believed to have personally supervised the executions of eight thousand Muslims in territories under their control (Stott 1999: 167). In our own country it is estimated that approximately seventeen thousand people died between 1985 and 1993 as a result of the oppressive ideology of apartheid. While the three thousand lives lost in New York city on 11 September 2001 pales in significance compared to the instances mentioned, the forcefulness and vividness with which the actions were displayed was a clear and sharp demonstration of the conflict of political ideology in modern society. This adds greatly to the significance of the event. In order to gain an understanding of events such as these and the political motives underlying such conflicts, a study of political ideology from a biblical perspective would be meaningful. The resultant ambivalence in our faith need to be addressed by a clearly defined biblical approach that brings about reconciliation between politics and religion in our collective psyche as Christians with our political conduct guided by the principals outlined in Scripture.

Andrew Heywood makes the following statement in introducing the concept of political ideology: "No one sees the world as it is. All of us look at the world through a veil of theories, presuppositions and assumptions. In this sense, observation and interpretation are inextricably bound together: when we look at the world we are also engaged in imposing meaning on it... At their deepest level, these assumptions are rooted in broad political creeds or traditions that are usually termed 'political ideologies' (1997: 39). Ideology is an arrangement of a set of ideas that would form the basis for an "organised political action" that would either lead to the preservation, modification or eradication of existing power relationships. By their nature "all ideologies (would) therefore (a) offer an account

of the existing order, usually in the form of a 'world view', (b) provide a model of a desired future, a vision of the good society, and (c) outline how political change can and should be brought about" (1997: 41). The objective of this paper is to evaluate political ideology from a biblical perspective in order to demonstrate the reconciliation of religion and politics as well as explain the ambivalence of our modern faith or belief systems.

2. Political Structures in the Ancient Near East

Olivier assigns the *Late Bronze Age* (1550 - 1200 BC), the *Iron Age* (1200 - 333 BC) and the Hellenistic and Roman Ages (333 BC - 324 BC) to the biblical people (1991: 154). Any study of the ancient Near East involves a study of ancient Israel which in turn is inextricably involved with a study of ancient Syria and Palestine. Niels Pieter Lemche associates Syria with Assyria postulating that Syria is a Greek derivative thereof while Palestine is associated with the Philistines who inhabited the southwestern part of the country. Archeological interest in the late twentieth century focuses primarily on the large cities of Syria and Palestine almost to the exclusion of many ordinary towns, villages and hamlets. As the history of Syria and Palestine lack written documentation, historical reconstruction became heavily dependent on archeological evidence. This situation is in stark contrast to the considerable documentation that was available from Mesopotamia and Egypt (Lemche 1995: 1195). Mesopotamian sources, for example, has extensively documented Syrian civilisation at the end of the *Early Bronze Age* while Palestine's history, certainly in the first half of the second millennium, can be followed from Egyptian sources. The absence of written documentation was largely characteristic of the tribal period. As these societies developed into states or was conquered by foreign powers such as was the case with Syria and Palestine in the first half of the first millennium, written documentation became more readily available. The availability of written documentation is important to the extent that it gives us insight into political ideologies prevalent in these ancient Near Eastern centres during that time.

2.1 Ancient Syria, Palestine and the rest of the Ancient Near East

Lemche takes issue with two assumptions in modern view which in his opinion has distorted our view of ancient Near Eastern society. The assumptions that biblical life centres around pastoral and seminomads and the view that conflicts arises out of the division in society between city dwellers and peasants or pastoral nomads are false according to Lemche (1995: 1198). To the first assumption he responds by confirming that the tribal organisation was not only characteristic of herdsmen and agriculturalists, but was also evident among urban citizens. Secondly conflicts not only took place amongst diverse groups but were certainly a feature of internal pressures within a group too. Conflict between an urban area and a farming community was largely a result of bureaucratic pressures exercised by the king and his staff.

Decentralised tribal societies and centralised states were prominent in Syria and Palestine since ancient times according to Lemche. Members of each community co-existed side by side as was evident in Mari during the nineteenth and eighteenth centuries and in early Israel during the twelfth to the eleventh centuries. With regard to their obligations, Lemche holds the view that "tribes as well as states were (and still are) political organisations that shared the same obligations: it was

their duty to provide the maximum amount of safety and welfare for their members” (1995: 1199). It seems as though members of societies in ancient Syria and Palestine could exercise a choice with regard to being “members of a tribe or citizens of a state” (1995: 1198).

The political power structures of tribes and states differed considerably from each other. The tribal political structure is decentralised by nature with authority vested in a number of important families known as the ruling clan. Individual membership and status is clearly linked to the prominence of a family within the tribal structure. The state on the other hand is a centralised bureaucratic system that recognises the private or public function of an individual and accords him or her status accordingly. Lemche’s summary on the distinct difference between the two structures is appropriate: “We may say that tribal membership is acknowledged when individuals have a place in its genealogy, whereas state membership is obtained when people are placed on its tax roll” (1995: 1199). While the tribe is organised along family lines concerned with the welfare of the family, civil life is organised around a bureaucratic lifestyle that reflects a distinct political ideology. The royal archives of Mari records the relationship between tribes and states since tribal societies did not have any written documents in this regard. The royal house of Mari originated in the Banu - Samal, a tribal group from northern Syria. They came into conflict with their kinsmen, the Banu - Yamina, afterwards. Early Israelite kings such as Saul and Jeroboam are documented in the Hebrew Bible as members of tribes. Tribal lineage during the early times played an important role in royal accession but this practice later fell into disuse. Position in the military hierarchy of the state of Israel became an important criterion for a royal candidate as king.

Political influence of a single family or person, namely a chieftain, within a tribe played an important role in the development from tribes to states. Lemche cites the kings of Mari and Israel as examples of this process. He states the following as motivating factors for this development: “The history of the Near East provides plenty of cases illustrating this evolution from tribe to state. Important factors behind this process are major political, economic and environmental changes that involve all of Syria and Palestine - for example, political pressure on the local population exerted by foreign powers, the establishment of international trade routes making military control over tribal land necessary, or periods of drought and famine that compels members of a tribe to seek refuge in places not so severely affected by the vagaries of the climate” (1995: 1199). These factors are critical to the development of a political ideology in this process. Transformation also took place from a centralised state position to a decentralised tribal position. *Retribalisation*, a term referred to by Lemche, was the result of the devastating and destructive influence of a foreign power on the central administrative system of a state.

For about two centuries during the *Early Bronze Age*, the urbanisation of Syria was evident in the leading city of Ebla. As the dominant city in Syria, Ebla managed to counteract Mesopotamian influence, organise a major part of Syria under its own rule and regulate transit trade through Syria. This would suggest that a fairly sophisticated political structure was in place during this time. The city of Ebla therefore represented an unrivalled political centre within the ancient Near East in the *Early Bronze Age*. This political system was subsequently challenged by Akkadian conquest resulting in the existing political structures being crushed and the eventual decline of cultural and economic activity. Urban life disappeared leaving in its wake modest and temporary settlements made up of migrant peasants and pastoralists, according to Lemche (1995: 1200). Palestine on the other hand did not have a political centre comparable to Ebla.

While the empire of Ebla consisted of a strong political network that held Syria together during the *Early Bronze Age*, or at least until the Akkadian conquest, Yamkhad fulfilled this role for northern Syria during the *Middle Bronze Age* around 1800 - 1600 BC. Yamkhad appeared to have a very strong and influential political structure in place with over twenty kings succeeding king Yarim-Lim of Yamkhad. These kings had considerable political influence and held sway over numerous petty kings and tribal leaders of Syria during this time. The unquestionable supremacy of Yamkhad, with its sphere of influence stretching from the Mukish kingdom in the west to Emar (or modern Meskene) on the banks of the Euphrates in the east, was however limited. The Syrian cities of Carchemish and Qatna were excluded from this control. Mari archives provide us with information on the history of Qatna according to Lemche. This history gives us a glimpse into another advanced political centre within Syria. Through its extensive relations with the northern Mesopotamian kingdoms, its direct trade route and royal relationships with Mari, Qatna became a very strong political influence in Syria. As important as this contribution from Qatna was, the alliance between Yamkhad and Qatna renewed mainly by Zimri-Lim, the new king of Mari, following the death of Shamshi-Adad and the removal of his son Yasmakh-Adad, as the king of Mari. The result of this alliance was that "a politically stable situation developed in northern and central Syria that was to survive the demise of the kingdom of Mari and the rising power of Hammurabi of Babylon" (Lemche 1995: 1203). Conflict between tribal societies and established political civilian rulers were not uncommon as Mari documents show. The tribal coalition, Banu-Yamina, later known as the Benjaminites of the Hebrew Bible, seems to have been central to this conflict.

The political supremacy that Yamkhad enjoyed in Syria was briefly interrupted when the Hittites conquered the capital of Aleppo at the end of the seventeenth century BC. Hurrian tribesmen from Anatolia in due course considerably influenced the political status quo in the region. Their infiltration into the Syrian plateau as well as northern Mesopotamia resulted in a more stabilizing effect on the prevailing political structures. Political control gained over the Amorites

resulted in the establishment of a number of Hurrian kingdoms. The kingdom of Mitanni, a Hurrian kingdom in upper Mesopotamia and eastern Syria developed into one of the major political powers of its time. The influence of foreign political power in Syria was limited effectively through this new political centre. The political balance of power was only seriously challenged by the Egyptian Pharaohs of the eighteenth Dynasty.

Not much evidence is available on the political structures prevalent in Palestine during the *Middle Bronze Age*. The little that is known was made available through Egyptian sources such as the *Execration Texts*, according to Lemche. The Egyptian *Story of Sinuhe* describes Palestine as a backward, primitive and barbarous region. Egypt's involvement in Palestine during this time was the development of commerce and the free flow of its products through the region. Political structure was in the form of small political units under the command of "a local dynast" with his administrative function situated in the city. The city of Hazor seemed to have played a major political role in Palestine as "small states may, however, have been united in a kind of federation, in which the city of Hazor played a leading part" (Lemche 1995: 1205). This became evident from a number of documents that were discovered in Mari (Mesopotamia). The nature of these documents from Hazor, were administrative records mainly in Akkadian. Palestine's political course was chartered by developments in Egypt. The invasion and eventual conquest of Egypt by the Hyksos, a movement originating from the Canaanite population of Palestine proper, lasted for several generations. The strong reactions of the pharaohs of the Eighteenth Dynasty resulted in mounting political pressure on the Hyksos and in the course of these events Palestine was conquered by Egypt, a number of its urban centres destroyed and a major change in political structure imposed on them by the Egyptian armies.

Political control during the *Early* and *Middle Bronze Ages* rested in centres such as Ebla, Yamkhad, Qatna and Hazor. The *Late Bronze Age* ushered in an entirely new political dispensation with much of the political control of these two areas in foreign hands. Foreign powers either sought complete political control or were willing to divide these areas amongst themselves. Syria, by the beginning of the *Late Bronze Age*, was under the political control of Mitanni. Egypt came to challenge this political hegemony and instead of conquering Syria outright, Egypt and Mitanni agreed to divide Syria between them. This alliance was also short-lived as the resurgence of the Hittites and the Assyrians replaced the developing power vacuum. Mitanni was totally subdued by both these powers while Egypt had to conclude a new alliance with Khatti. Palestine through all of this was firmly locked into the Egyptian power base. Documents from a number of small states in Syria and Palestine give us some insight into the political order during this time. "In general, these small states were bound in vassalage to one of the great powers. Only occasionally did they have the opportunity to pursue an independent foreign policy; normally they simply had to submit to the will of their overlord. The internal affairs of all these petty kingdoms were, however in the hands of local

authorities. The center of the state was the city, and in its palace were accommodated both the political and economic administration” (Lemche 1995: 1207).

While most of the Syrian population lived in villages, the Palestinian population lived in walled towns. Those Syrian states that were geographically isolated could to a certain degree still exercise a limited amount of political control. Despite this the political structures of the Syro-Palestinian states, during the *Late Bronze Age*, were severely limited by material and human resources. This had a negative impact on their ability to cope with political challenges such as “massive popular movements or uprisings” (Lemche 1995: 1207). There was no unity amongst the petty rulers of these Syro-Palestinian states which compounded the situation. This led to major pressure on the urbanised culture to the extent that Palestine experienced a drastic reduction in living standards during this period. The stabilising influence of the Hittite Empire on the region disappeared as a result of internal problems. Lemche holds the view that the disappearance of the Hittite Empire “opened the way for a whole range of destabilizing influences” (1995: 1208). One of these groups that gradually infiltrated the region were “Sea People” who were regarded as the forerunners of the Philistines mentioned in the Hebrew Scriptures. Their massive offensive in 1200 BC destroyed settled life in most of Palestine and Syria with only a few exceptions such as Carchemish in northern Syria which survived under Hittite administration well into the eighth century BC.

2.2 Premonarchic Israel and the Tribal Confederacy

In his description of the *Israelite Tribal League*, Bright (1981: 162) makes the following statement: “From the beginning of her life in Palestine down to the rise of the monarchy, a period of some two hundred years, Israel existed as a loosely organized system of tribes. Through all of this period she had no central government or machinery of state. Yet, in spite of this, with incredible toughness and under the most adverse of circumstances, she managed to survive as a self-conscious entity, clearly set apart from her neighbors round about”. This tribal system provided Israel with the necessary ability to establish her “sacred traditions and characteristic institutions” (Bright 1981: 163) as a norm. While the rest of the villages and cities within the Syro-Palestinian region boasted more civilized political structures, Israel’s tribal existence, although considered to be primitive in many ways, had a distinct politico-religious culture based on a covenantal relationship with Yahweh. Israel’s existence was therefore based on “a sacral league of tribes founded in covenant with Yahweh” (Bright 1981: 163). What seems to have clearly set Israel apart from neighbouring tribes and cities was most certainly her religious and, as a result thereof, her political traditions and ideology. Elazar and Cohen (1985: 8) confirm that Israel’s political tradition was as much concerned with power and justice as any other political tradition might have been. It differed fundamentally from other traditions in the sense that relationships were more important than political structures. This would change later under Samuel’s rulership. Israel’s covenantal relationship with Yahweh was therefore “the basis

for defining all political relationships within the Jewish tradition” (Elazar and Cohen 1985: 8). Ahlström describes this biblical twelve tribe system as a “historiographic reconstruction” (1995: 588). Use of the term “amphictyony (a political organisation uniting people around a central religious sanctuary)” (1995: 588), advanced by scholars such as Martin Noth in 1930, were considered misplaced as a result of a lack of empirical evidence. The term amphictyony was therefore replaced by the term “tribal league” or “confederacy”. Advancing his argument against this concept, Ahlström states that “nothing of the kind can be demonstrated as an empirical reality” (1995: 588). He further states that this “is the biblical writer’s way of ‘solving’ the problem of religio-political unity in the premonarchic period” (1995: 588).

The political sway that Egypt held over the Syro-Palestinian states most certainly affected the region to a large measure. The cultural, military, economic and political influence exercised by the new Egyptian Empire was considerable and Egyptian control over Palestine (or Canaan in particular) was only weakened around 1150 BC due to Egypt’s inability to constrain the growing Philistine presence. Olivier is of the view that “people prefer to settle in isolated areas, preferably as families or clans” when faced with “political, military and economic instability” (1991: 154). He describes premonarchic Israel as “characterised by a proliferation of isolated villagers in the central highlands, where the people struggled to make the land arable and inhabitable in order to survive” (1991: 154). The economy was largely one of subsistence with no central administration. Common threats through raids and local conflicts were dealt with through cooperation of the villagers. There was neither a system of taxation nor a national service that would ensure general defense. Olivier credits “the mountain villagers’ communal labour projects, value system and commitment to certain religious symbols and cultic places where ancient traditions were perpetuated (e.g. the temple at Shiloh where the Ark of the Covenant was kept) “as among the few unifying factors that prevailed at the time. These villagers considerably lacked effective leadership and consolidated political structures with a unifying political ideology.

Ahlström alludes to William Foxwell Allbright’s description of the history of premonarchic Israel, constructed by biblical tradition, as a “pious fiction”. Documentation of the history of this period in the life of Israel was non-existent. Ahlström asserts that “there had never been a national system encompassing all of the different social and political units that emerged at the beginning of the *Iron Age*, when the central hills were settled” (1995: 588). Social structures with regard to tribal division were created from memories about chiefs (“judges”). Not only is the history of premonarchic Israel problematic, but so is also the nature of the tribal system as well as the origins of Israel as a nation. Discarding Martin Noth’s amphictyony hypothesis, blood kinship, emergency alliances and Israel’s common Yahwistic religion as the only means to explain the existence of early Israel, Bright is of the opinion that “the only really satisfying explanation is that it must have

come about through, some solemn ceremony of ‘mass conversion’ like the great covenant at Shechem described in Joshua Chapter 24” (1981: 65). He further states that “we may with some confidence believe that Israel came into existence in Palestine as a confederation of tribes united in covenant with Yahweh” (1981: 165). This covenant forms a critical component in the political ideology of the tribal structure and would continue to do so under the monarchy.

There seem to be some doubt as to whether the confederation initially consisted of the classical twelve tribes from the start or whether the grouping was much more smaller and grew over the years. Bright describes the political structure of the tribal system as “exceedingly loose” with no state apparatus in the form of central government, capital city, administrative machinery or bureaucracy. The covenant with Yahweh ensured a peaceful co-existence between the tribes. Structured around a patriarchal system and lacking organised government, particularly “the stratification characteristic of the feudal society of Canaan” (Bright 1981: 166), the tribal league or confederation probably represented by the *nāsî*, its head, depended on the elders of the clan to adjudicate conflicts. The shrine where the Ark of the Covenant was located became a focal point in their Yahwistic faith. They would gather here on special occasions to renew their allegiance to Yahweh. Mari texts, for example, show that similar tribal confederations existed at the time such as the possible existence of a Midianite tribal confederation. Israel had close contacts with the Midianites in the desert. With very little supporting evidence on the structure and functions of these tribal confederations, “we may suppose that the Israelite league differed from them less in its external form than its ideology, the covenant with Yahweh through which it had been formed” (Bright 1981: 167).

Judges Chapter 12 gives us an indication that the tribal confederation was in operation with at least ten members by the twelfth century. It came into existence soon after the struggle for land. The origin of the covenantal relationship with Yahweh, on which the confederation was based, is assumed to go back to the Sinai desert. It was eventually concretely affirmed at Shechem. Elazar and Stuart (1985: 10) confirm that the Sinai covenant had the effect of transforming the Israelite tribes into a body politic that could, if they wanted to, develop a constitution and political regime. In terms of this covenant Yahweh assumed direct rule over his people. There is no doubt that inherited tribal tradition as well as the guidance of Jethro, Moses’ father-in-law, played a significant role in this early political tradition.

2.3 Political Ideology in the Ancient Near East

Let us for a moment refer back to the discussion on the Syro-Palestinian city-states and tribal areas that existed especially in the *Early and Middle Bronze Ages*. It is evident from this discussion that tribal societies united specifically around safety and subsistence issues. The political ideology of the time focused on the promotion of trade with other areas, the safe passage of goods and the overall safety and administration (where bureaucracy existed) of the tribal village or city-

state. “A common expression for a Syro-Palestinian city-state is ‘X and its villages’. For instance an Amarna letter refers to the state of Hazor in Galilee as ‘Hazor and its villages’. This language is also found in the Hebrew Bible” (Ahlström 1995: 588). This gives us some insight into the structures of villages and city-states with a particular ideology in mind. Ahlström’s analyses reflect the type of political ideology that was present in the ancient Near East. As new political units emerged, led by chieftains and petty kings, a bureaucracy developed. These states are referred to by Ahlström as “pristine states”. The models of government available in the ancient Near East were primarily kingship with alternatives such as oligarchy and theocracy. Kingship however seem to have been the prevailing and dominant model. According to Ahlström, “there did not really exist any lasting alternative to kingship” (1995: 588). Oligarchy as a political model and ideology was a temporary phenomenon in the ancient Near East and was characterised by conflicts between various oligarchs. Through affiliation to a more powerful ruler, in times of conflict, they affirm a kingship or even at times a despotic structure led by a king or chieftain. What is an oligarchy? Andrew Heywood describes an oligarchy as “government or domination by a few” (1997: 238). Syro-Palestine did not boast any democratic institutions as “there were no conceptual channels for the establishment of such a political system” (Ahlström 1995: 588). Texts from Ugarit, Tell al-Amarna and the Hebrew Bible cite instances where an assembly of people could give counsel or even oppose a ruler. This however did not meet the requirements for democracy as we understand it.

The second “alternative” to kingship was a kingship which recognises one or other deity as a ruler with the king as his deputy. This governing ideology would be referred to as a royal theocracy. A theocracy is described as “literally ‘rule by God’ ... a regime in which government posts are filled on the basis of the person’s position in the religious hierarchy” (Heywood 1997: 35). Another variant of this concept is referred to by Ahlström as a hierocracy, which is “a theocracy led by a priesthood” (1995: 588). Ahlström describes the fundamental administrative system of the ancient Near East as led by chieftains, aristocratic military leaders or kings. A monarchic system of government was in place in many of the territorial states. The Amarna letters from the fourteenth century BC details the relationship between Syro-Palestinian “kinglets” and the Egyptian “overlord” the pharaoh. These kinglets or princes were referred to as “chief magistrates, mayors or regents”. A monarchic system was also in existence amongst the Phoenician city-states. In Palestine, the existence of the Philistine federation of five city states is recorded in the Bible and Akkadian texts according to Ahlström. A monarchic government with kings and military governors represented the political structures of these entities. Ahlström identifies possible oligarchies in Shechem, a city in conflict with King Abimelech according to Judges 9, the Gibeonite federation referred to in Joshua 9 and also the cities of Fennel and Succoth referred to in Judges 8. Elders played a crucial role in the political structures of the time. Ahlström described the importance of their functions as follows: “We can view the elders as an originally independent political entity that eventually became a tool of

the royal administration” (1995: 590). They performed a very important decision-making function at the city gates, exercised legal authority over their communities and collected taxes.

3. Political Structures in the Hebrew Bible (1 Sam. 8)

The political structures and ideology of the ancient Near East were by far advanced by the time Israel became a monarchy. It is in fact this state of affairs that contributed significantly to Israel's agitation for a king through their outcry "Let us be like the nations". Their distinctive political ideology, based on their covenantal relationship with Yahweh, was about to take a dramatic turn with the advent of the monarchy in Israel.

3.1 *The Kingship Ideology in the Ancient Near East*

Kingship was regarded as a divine institution that had been in place since time immemorial according to Ahlström. It was accepted as sanctioned from heaven and the absence of kingship would result in chaos as indicated in Judges 17: 6. While the earlier roles played by kings are not well known, it was commonly accepted that the concept of king in Syro-Palestinian thinking was that he was a son of a god and were entitled to act as the patron deity of a city. The divine status of the king as well as the religious foundation of kingship is clearly demonstrated in Psalms 2: 7: "*You are my son; I have given birth to you*". Legitimation of the power of a ruler in ancient Palestine was derived from a kingship ideology that was anchored in the divine will. Zakkur of Hamath (in Syria) could legitimately, in his view, claim that the god Baalshamein appointed him king of Hazrak. This ideological connection between royalty and the divine realm was used also by the prophets in acceptance of this legitimised role of a ruler. Ahlström also points to a lack of consistency of this kingship model between states and over time. The conquest of a state by a superpower could witness not only the alteration of the internal political structure, but also the reduction of the "divine affiliation" in terms of which a vassal state could be overseen by a local deity.

Not only was kingship viewed in the ancient Near East as a divine institution, but the selection of a successor by a reigning king was accepted as being anchored in the "divine will" of the deity. As a common conception in the Near East, this choice was seen as an "expression of legitimacy". Psalm 2:7 and 22:9 demonstrate this relationship through the process of birth. The Ugaritic text describes king Keret as the son of the god El (Ahlström 1995: 591). According to Van der Toorn (1995: 2049), king Keret may be compared to the king of Judea who in Psalms 2: 7 and 110: 3 was proclaimed as the son of Yahweh at the moment of his induction. The Egyptian king on the other hand was regarded as a god incarnate while he performed his royal duties. This could differ from the ideological perspective of other countries in the ancient Near East. Ahlström points out that the Assyrian king was regarded as the son of a god while Esarhaddon is referred to as both the son of Ninlil and the son of Shamash. The Sumerian king Shulgi is accepted as being born of the goddess Ninsun while Enmerkar of Uruk was "born of the faithful cow" that is the goddess (Ahlström 1995: 591). Karel van der Toorn agrees with Ahlström on the legitimation process of kingship when he makes the following statement: "Because the national god was such a powerful symbol, every

human king sought to obtain his divine support to legitimate his rule” (van der Toorn 1995: 2049). With the achievement of this divine affirmation or legitimation, the duties of the king are focused on “maintaining and increasing the power of the deity” (Ahlström 1995: 591). The king’s mandate would include the caretaking of the god’s territory and its people ensuring an increase in size and influence in the process. As chief administrator of the god’s territory, the king could make use of “administrators, officers, priests, local governors, palace officials, merchants, and tax collectors” (Ahlström 1995: 592) in order to perform his bureaucratic function.

This close relationship between the gods and the rulers predestines the existence and function of the king within a religious milieu. By its nature it would create a distinct political ideology based on a particular religious worldview that finds expression in the cultic rights of the kingdom. Van der Toorn’s view is that “because of the political implications of the official religion, it is not surprising to find the king playing an important religious role” (1995: 2048, 2049). The relationship between palace and temple was very closely connected to the extent that one could hardly distinguish between religion and politics. Van der Toorn makes the point that “although it would be incorrect to suppose that ancient Syro-Palestinian religion was a state ideology in disguise, it is true that the official religion was largely coterminous with the state religion” (1995: 2049). This situation did however influence the political ideology that resulted from the state. Its structures were such that the king played a critical role in the religious affairs of the state, at times acting as the chief priest. The king’s influence over the royal sanctuary and his power to appoint and dismiss priests as civil servants was considerable. By transferring the Ark of the Covenant from Kiriath-jearim to Jerusalem and by simultaneously turning the political capital into the religious capital, David ensured greater political control over his subjects.

The king sometimes had the dual role of priest. This came about as the result of the close relationship between political affairs of the state and its religious orientation. Where the king did not act as priest, his involvement in religious matters would find expression in appointments and decrees. The involvement of the king in the temple cult ensured constant and consistent support from the religious sanctuary. The temple servants interceded for the royal authorities as part of their duties. They would ask the gods to bless the rulership of the king. The autumn festival, referred to by scholars as the New Year Festival, was an occasion used by the temple priests for a public endorsement of the king on behalf of the national god. The divine position of the national god was celebrated in the autumn festival in Ugarit and Emar as early as the *Late Bronze Age* (Van der Toorn 1995: 2050).

The relationship between religion and politics (i.e. kingship) gave ancient Near Eastern societies a distinct political worldview. It was this political ideology,

present in ancient Near Eastern societies for hundreds of years, that was eventually to infiltrate Israel's worldview from the twelfth century onwards.

3.2 *Israel under a Monarchy*

- *The Relationship between a National Deity and its People*

The relationship between a national deity and its people had a considerable influence on the political ideology of the relevant nation. Van der Toorn describes the statement in Deuteronomy 32: 8 (Greek Text) - "the bounds of the peoples (having) being fixed according to the number of the gods (literally 'sons of God')" - as "a retrospective explanation - and as such a justification - of the fact that in the first millennium each nation and each country had its particular god" (1995: 2048). Each god was given his inheritance in terms of a divine plan according to the Deuteronomist. Inheritance as a theological concept features prominently in the Hebrew Bible. The people of Israel as well as their land are designated as the "inheritance of Yahweh" in the Hebrew Scriptures. This was also characteristic of other nations in the ancient Near East. From the Ugaritic texts we learn that Mount Zaphon is recorded as the inheritance of Baal, Hkpt (or Memphis?) as the inheritance of the god Kothar and the netherworld as the inheritance of Mot, god of death. Through Yahweh's covenantal relationship with Israel, He was regarded as the "king" of Israel. Van der Toorn argues that "because Yahweh was not automatically considered the god of Israel, his position as national deity had to be based on a theological construction that did not presuppose a perennial solidarity between him and the people of Israel. There had to be a deliberate choice, as implied by the theological theme of election, which was initiated by Yahweh" (1995: 2048). This distinctive relationship as formulated by Israel's spiritual leaders ensured the political symbolisation of Yahweh. This was not only the case in Israel, but was certainly more widespread throughout the ancient Near East. National deities such as Baal at Ugarit, Dagan among the Philistines and Chemosh among the Moabites as well as Yahweh became the political symbols of their respective nations. Political allegiance and patriotism found expression in devotion to the national god.

- *From Tribe to Chiefdom*

Political organisation of a community is necessitated by the need "to exercise some form of control over individual members in order to ensure the proper functioning of society" (Deist 2000: 276). The question of monarchy is explicitly raised for the first time in 1 Samuel Chapter 8, according to Walter Brueggemann. As such it "occupies a pivotal place in Israel's literature concerning kingship" (1990: 60). Brueggemann sees in the literature of 1 Samuel a dispute "between the old tradition of tribal reliance on Yahweh and the new ideology of monarchy" (1990: 60). Inherent in this dispute is the significant shift in the political ideology of ancient Israel bringing her in line with the political ideologies of her neighbours while simultaneously retaining a form of uniqueness. Bright argues that while Israel may have borrowed political features from the national kingdoms of Edom,

Moab and Ammon, its political structures were distinctly different to the feudal city-state system of either Canaan or Philistia (1981: 189).

The origin of the institution of kingship in Israel was characterised by two opposing traditions - one in favour of kingship and the other opposed to it (Bright 1981; Robinson 1993). The proposal by the elders or the “political old guard” of Israel for a new political order in their outcry “to be like the nations” was regarded as an act of apostasy against Yahweh and their rejection of Him (1 Sam. 8: 7; 10: 19). Yahweh concedes despite this rejection. According to Brueggemann, “the final hope of the advocates of monarchy is to have a king who fights battles (1 Sam. 8: 20), who gives the appearance of security, and adds the prestige that comes through a military program” (1990: 65). Robinson reminds us of the Bible’s warning against conformity to other world powers and cultures more because of their oppressive regimes (1993: 52). It is this biblical warning that carries significant weight in the unfolding events of Revelation. He makes the point that the request by the elders to have political structures that conform to that of other nations is nothing new. According to him, this desire to conform “is present today in the encounter between the so called First World and the Third World. The industrial, technocratic culture of the First World is attracting the poor and weaker Third World, and the temptation is great among many people in the Third World to copy the First World blindly” (1993: 52). Third World countries, as those less developed countries of Africa, Asia and Latin America, who command only 18% of the world’s GDP with 52% of the world’s population is contrasted with First World countries made up of western democracies who contribute 63% of the world’s GDP with only 15% of the world’s population according to a 1985 World Bank classification (Heywood 1997: 27).

Deist in his book, *The Material Culture of the Bible* (2000) argues and concurs with Flanagan (1981) that despite the fact that Saul, David and Solomon were referred to as kings, suggesting that the tribal confederacy had suddenly made way for a kingdom, the narratives relating to Saul and David is much more appropriately defined as a “chiefdom”, with the later rulership of David and that of Solomon qualifying as a kingship (2000: 278). He sees a chiefdom as “a first movement towards central government” (2000: 278). Deist describes two conditions, namely environmental and social circumscription, that normally would give rise to the need for a central government. “Environmental circumscription occurs when increased production, necessitated by, for example, population growth or tributes extracted from the region, is inhibited by scarce natural resources. Social circumscription occurs when a single indigenous, foreign group succeeds in securing the use of natural resources for itself, thereby denying other groups access to these resources. In such circumstances the groups living in a region may go under, migrate or unite” (2000: 278). These conditions were prevalent during the time of Saul, David and Solomon. Deist demonstrates environmental circumscription by citing Joshua 17: 14 where restricted space is an issue for the Joseph people: “*Why have you (Joshua) given me (Joseph) but one lot*

and one portion as an inheritance, since we are a numerous people ... ?” (2000: 279). 1 Kings 4: 20 describe Judah and Israel as “numerous as the sand by the sea” (2000: 279).

Social circumscription on the other hand was caused by the infiltration of the Philistines. The existence of the tribal confederacy after approximately two hundred years faced a major and defeating challenge with Philistine aggression and conquest. Bright describes the Philistines as “a military autocracy which ruled a predominantly Canaanite population with whom, as the names of their gods and most of their personal names indicate, they progressively amalgamated” (1981: 185). They were militarily formidable with a strong military tradition. Their iron weapon superiority far outweighed the weaponry of either the Israelite tribes or any of the Canaanite nations. Israel’s loose tribal organisation could not under any circumstances meet this formidable challenge from the Philistines. Starting with initial skirmishes such as the conflict with the tribes of Judah and Dan, resulting in their displacement, 1 Samuel chapter 4 records the final decisive blow by the Philistines near Aphek after 1050 BC. The Ark was brought from Shiloh to ensure victory through Yahweh’s presence. The Philistines succeeded, however, killing Hophni and Phineas, priests of Israel who transported the Ark. The land was occupied, Shiloh was conquered and the Ark destroyed.

The political structure of chiefdom can be distinguished from a tribal rule on the one hand and royal rule on the other (Deist 2000: 279). Similar to tribal leaders, a chief is a leader of “a localized descent or territorial group” (Deist 2000: 279) having achieved his status through “being wealthy, generous, successful, admirable, eloquent, physically brave and sometimes also skilled in dealing with the supernatural” (Deist 2000: 279). Saul is described in 1 Sam. 9: 1 and 1 Sam. 11 as a tall and brave man from a family that was well-known. David’s attributes as a war hero (1 Sam. 17: 23; 17), an excellent negotiator and skilled musician (1 Sam. 16: 16; 2 Sam. 1: 22) and his ability to look after the clans around him by unselfishly distributing the proceeds of war, qualified him more than was necessary for his leadership role. The political structure of a chiefdom differs from that of a tribal organisation in that it is a more permanent structure “around which political power is centralized” (Deist 2000: 279). In this sense a chiefdom is similar to a monarchy. The structure does however display an inherent weakness in its instability and it being prone to internal power struggles among officials or even family members. This is demonstrated by Saul’s fear and persecution of David (1 Sam. 18 - 31), the conflict preceding David’s succession to Saul (1 Sam. 2: 12 - 3: 1) and the power struggle amongst David’s children for leadership as recorded in 2 Sam. 15 - 1 Kings 1 (Deist 2000: 279).

A second correlation can be drawn between a chiefdom and a monarchy, unlike that of a tribal leadership. It has a chain of command that links all leaders in a social ranking system. The appointment of David, Absalom and their cousins as chiefs of the army (2 Sam 8: 16; 17: 25) and David’s administration (2 Sam. 23: 8)

as “of the third rank” (Deist 2000: 280) demonstrates this point. The political structure of a chiefdom in the third place differs from a monarchy in the sense that it lacks the ability to enforce contribution to “the central pool of the redistribution economy” (2000: 280). It did not quite have the necessary bureaucratic machinery in place to enable this. The divine election or appointment of a chief is affirmed, very much like in a monarchy, as the division between the chief’s centre and the dependent settlements become more sharply defined. Saul and David were regarded as divinely appointed as recorded in 1 Sam. 9 and 16: 1 - 13 (2000: 280). Both Saul and David assumed the role of monarch more and more, wearing a crown and accumulating wealth in the process.

- *Political Structure of the Monarchy*

Christa Schäfer-Lichtenberger asserts that “it is no coincidence that historians prefer the terms ‘dominion/ monarchy/ rulership’ over ‘state’ when describing the political structure of Israel”. She continues: “Terms like ‘dominion’ or ‘rulership’ appear to imply indistinct notions about the sociopolitical organisation, whereas to a good number of researchers, the idea of a rigid sociostructural organisation is inherent in the term ‘state’ (1996: 83). Deist, agreeing with Cohen and Service (1978), describes the process of primary state formation as essentially “driven by the inner logic of chiefdoms, that is, a chiefdom’s hierarchical social and economic structuring of society becomes a ‘centripetal’ force favouring its own strengthening and perpetuation” (2000: 281). Saul’s rulership of the chiefdom can be regarded as emergency leadership in the face of a Philistine onslaught and would appropriately fit into the rulership description advanced by Schäfer-Lichtenberger above. Israel’s tribal political structure under Saul’s “kingship” was not changed in any way. The organisation prevalent under tribal structures was left intact with no administrative and bureaucratic machinery developed. Saul did not boast a large harem, which at the time was an indication of wealth and status. Abner, his kinsman, was the only known officer who was in charge of collecting the tribal levies. Gibeah was more of a fortress than a palace and his army existed primarily out of necessity. According to Bright these factors certainly do not justify Saul as a king in Israel (1981: 191).

Elman Service conceptualised the stage of chiefdom as “the evolutionary pre-stage of the primary state” (Schäfer-Lichtenberger 1996: 88). Max Weber distinguishes between a modern state and a state-organisation prevalent in the premodern era (1996: 88). He describes the latter category of political structure or organisation as patrimonial states based on the model of *oikos*. Political power is based on an agreement between a ruler and his subjects with the subjects under obligation to pay taxes for political purposes only. Political administration is primarily concerned with the royal household, while the appointment of officials is based on the relationship with the ruler. Empirical studies done by Henri Claessen, Ronald Cohen and Peter Skolnik (1978) has revealed that the emergence of early states are motivated by “population, growth and pressure, war and the threat of war, conquests and raids, advances in production and the emergence of surplus,

tributes, a common ideology and concepts of legitimation and influence from states already in existence” (1996: 90). The political ideology of these states, which is characteristic of early Israel monarchy, would therefore find expression in the political structures put in place to accommodate the above criteria.

Weber and Claessen, according to Schäfer-Lichtenberger, analysed the biblical record on the early state of Israel under the control of Saul and David (i.e. only the latter part of his reign is included). The following comparative criteria is representative of their findings in this regard and gives us some insight as to the factors that influenced the political ideology of the early state of Israel under the rulership of these initial monarchs (Schäfer-Lichtenberger 1996: 96 - 105).

Population Size

Saul was accepted as sovereign by his army of 600 men in terms of 1 Sam. 13: 15 while one can conclude from the text recording David’s rule (2 Sam. 2 - 1 Kings 1) that during the time of Hebron, David’s rulership already extended over more than 500 persons.

Territory

2 Sam. 2: 9 lists Saul’s diverse territories as Gilead, Ashuri, Jezreel, Ephraim, Benjamin and all of Israel. He even had outlying areas such as Keilah (1 Sam. 23: 7 - 13) and Ziph (1 Sam. 23: 19) under his territorial claim. There was conflict with the Philistines, Moabites and Ammonites with regard to territories to the west and the east. Ruling initially from Hebron, David’s territory is subsequently considerably increased by his later political unification with Israel. His political sovereignty is established with his victory over the Philistines (2 Sam. 5: 17; 8: 1). His further victory over the Arameans (2 Sam. 8: 2, 12 - 14) ensured expansion of his rulership in an easterly direction.

Centralised Government

The government centre, consisting of Saul and his royal household was located at Gibeah. Clearly defined functions of the government included military (1 Sam. 14: 50b; 16: 21; 18: 5), economic (1 Sam 21: 8; 22: 9; 2 Sam. 9: 2) and ritualistic functions (1 Sam. 22: 11-19; 22: 15) with strong control over the Yahweh temple. Saul’s political administration was regarded as “an occasional one” with no mention made in the text of a tax administration system. Remuneration to officials was in the form of lodging, food as well as land allocations (1 Sam. 22:7). David’s government centre was initially at Hebron (2 Sam. 2: 3 - 4) and later was moved to Jerusalem (2 Sam. 5: 6). The king and members of his royal household made up the initial political structure in Hebron. The Hebron administration was led by David with his men settled in villages around Hebron. This enabled David to control his personal following as well as his domestic affairs. Military campaigns resorted under the leadership of Joab. Two further groups were responsible for policing matters and the delivery of political messages to David. David’s harem of six wives and a group of children is an indication of his reasonable economic

capacity to look after them. David's political structure, centred in Jerusalem, appear to be radically different to his administration at Hebron. As David's political transactions became more complexed, his political structure was adapted to become more task orientated. David's initial list of high ranking officers (2 Sam 8: 16 - 18) catered for two military and three civilian officers (i.e. a recorder, priest and secretary). The civil administration with the advisors, Ahitophel and Hushai, shows a more complex political structure than was the case up to now. A further political restructuring takes place with a new official, Adoniram, appointed in charge of forced labour and the order of rank within the civilian administration changed with the priest last in rank (2 Sam. 20: 23 - 26). "The exercise of (political) power and control (became) predominant" (Schäfer-Lichtenberger 1996: 103). This control was reflected in the monarch's claim to authority in the selection of priests, appointment of an official in charge of forced labour and the admission of an east Jordanian priest to the list of officials, recognising the area's political significance.

Political Independence

Schäfer-Lichtenberger describes the continued political organisation that followed Saul's death as "an indication that the political structures were established to a degree that was independent of the person and the ruler-position of the commander" (1996: 98). Eshbaal's appointment as king, rather than David who was favoured by the Philistines at the time, suggest the "demonstration of political independence from the Philistines" (1996: 98). David's state gains independence from the Philistines and is successful in warding off external threats (2 Sam. 5: 17 - 27; 10). As monarch, David initially serves as supreme commander of the army (2 Sam. 12: 28 - 29; 18: 1 - 2). Following Absalom's rebellion, the army is restructured to include commanding ranks of general, regimental (1000 men) and battalion (100 men) commanders (2 Sam. 18: 1). David's state differs considerably to that of Saul in that it demonstrates a focused defense system for the territorial units under his control.

Stratification

The political stratification of both monarchs are identical. The distinction between the ruler and the ruled is clearly demarcated. Both had the final say in political matters and dealt with traitors and opponents in a similar manner.

Productivity of Surplus and Tributes

The biblical texts are not too clear on the financing of Saul's political structure. Sources of income identified are gifts (1 Sam. 10: 27), spoils of war (1 Sam. 13: 14), income from Saul's royal household and services (1 Sam. 14: 54; 18: 19). It is assumed that the existing army was sponsored by a surplus economy. Under David's political administration, the army, court and centralized cult appear to have been maintained by a surplus economy. Regional markets, trade contacts (2 Sam. 5: 11) and tributary contributions from conquered provinces kept the economic machinery in working order. Income was derived from "gifts (8:10; 16:

27), booty (2 Sam. 8:4, 7 - 8, 12: 30), tributes (8: 2, 6), crown estate, forced labour (12: 31; 20: 24) and services (1 Kings 1: 4)". The expense budgets included the bodyguards, foreign legion, harem, state cult and officials.

Common Ideology and Concepts of Legitimacy

Saul's leadership is confirmed by Yahweh's agreement, the choice of the elders and through his successes. He succeeds in unifying the tribes under his leadership and retains control of the religious sanctuary (1 Sam. 22: 9 - 19). David's rulership is based on an agreement with the men of Judah (2 Sam. 2: 4) and the elders of Israel (5: 3). His kingship does not in any way require legitimation. David combines the religious and political capital of Israel (the United Monarchy) by transferring the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem. Schäfer-Lichtenberger asserts that "David's election to the throne is portrayed as an expression of divine predestination (2 Sam. 5: 2b), and it leads to the development of a religious leadership ideology, which culminates in the divine promise of an enduring dynasty (2 Sam. 7: 11 - 16)" (1996: 105).

The legislative and judicial powers of the early kings of Israel were extremely limited compared to that of their neighbours. The legal codes from Mesopotamia, although regarded as collections of customary laws according to De Vaux, "they were at least promulgated by royal authority" with decrees issued by the king (1961: 150). The religious law in Israel and its covenantal relationship did not allow the king to have any judicial authority. The king's authority was extended over his administrative bureaucracy but not to enact laws. De Vaux mentions that it is noteworthy that the king is not mentioned in the Deuteronomic code. Josaphat for instance told his judges to apply the law of Yahweh (2 Ch. 19: 5 - 7) and to promote it as such (2 Ch. 17: 9) and not as the law of the king. The two "laws of the king" referred to in 1 Sam. 8: 11 - 18 and Deut. 17: 14 - 20, were remarkable in the sense that they warn the people against the arbitrary acts of the king and secondly instructs him to keep a copy of the divine law and obey it at all times. Yahweh's rulership and judicial authority was firmly entrenched. De Vaux confirms that "there was no such thing as State law in Israel" during this time (1961: 151). Through the foreign rule of Artaxerxes was the "law of God brought by Esdras" credited to the king as his law (1961: 151).

It was David's rule that ultimately found favour with Yahweh to the extent that Yahweh made a covenant with David ensuring that Jesus was from the line of David. It is my opinion that the political ideology founded on a strong religious cult and prevalent in the premonarchic era, re-emerged under David's kingship. The political structures and ideologies outlined above and as representative of the kingship of both Saul and David should not come as a surprise. Samuel's warning to the people (1 Sam. 8: 11 - 18) of the dire consequences of a monarchy (i.e. "you will be ... slaves" - v. 17b), goes unheeded. Israel's covenantal relationship with Yahweh demanded a "peculiar form of social and political power" (Brueggemann 1990: 66). 1 Sam. 8 concerns itself with what Brueggemann describes as "the

attractiveness and danger of political-economic monopoly” - a monopoly that does not find unqualified support from Yahweh as a result of its oppressive nature (1990: 67). Yahweh’s initial tacit approval of the pro-kingship lobby carries a tinge of sadness considering His stance against oppression and slavery. Yahweh’s concern for the political oppression and persecution of his people has been consistent throughout the ages with that concern ultimately finding expression in the developments of Revelation and the establishment of an eternal political structure that ensures no more suffering for His people. Robinson points out that “the heads of government are given power to serve the people; but those who wield power when they put ‘self’ before ‘people’ exhibit the fact that power corrupts, and that absolute power corrupts absolutely” (1993: 53). This situation would manifest in a major way under the Roman Empire a few centuries later and would be the catalyst for God’s powerful reaction in the Apocalypse. Samuel’s warning is directed against this abuse of rulership. This warning found expression in Solomon’s reign. Robinson describes Solomon’s reign as extravagant with the people having to pay the price for his extravagance through their oppression (1 Kings 12: 4). His excesses included a huge army and large harem. Classical Israel experienced its golden age as an empire under the kingship of David around 1000 BC and more specifically under the reign of Solomon. Its influence extended throughout Palestine and beyond including a number of vassal states. David’s dominant personality was the single cohesive force that kept the empire together. Solomon developed the political and religious structures further by instituting a centralised government staffed with sufficient administrators and a national religious cult that was centred in Jerusalem.

4. Political Structures in the time of Jesus

Luke Chapter 2 records that Jesus was born under the reign of Caesar Augustus, the Emperor of the early Roman Empire. Herod was king of Israel. Based in Jerusalem, his kingship was vassalage of the great Roman Empire under which Palestine fell. His relationship to the Roman Empire was that of a client king. Everett Ferguson views the role of Augustus as a turning point in history in the same manner that Alexander's rule was considered a turning point. He asserts that "the contributions of Augustus of significance for early Christianity include peace, economic prosperity, improved communications, stable government, and a sense of renewal" (1993: 29). There appeared to be the proverbial light at the end of the tunnel for the progress of Christianity, but instead it was the light of a fast moving train on its way to crush them.

4.1 Political History up to the Birth of Jesus

Benedikt Otzen reminds us that "there was always an intensive interaction between political and religious developments in Jewish society; the one facet cannot be understood without reference to the other. Political events triggered religious reactions, and religious attitudes initiated certain chains of political action" (1990: 8). Solomon's building of the temple around 959 BC is an affirmation of the religious cultus under his reign. The empire disintegrated after Solomon's death in 930 BC no less due to his own extravagance and improper management. The united kingdom split between north and south and could not withstand the onslaught from major powers. The southern kingdom, Judah, in contrast to the northern kingdom experienced more political and religious stability. Otzen states that while the northern kingdom was simply assimilated into its new environment, the southern kingdom remained focused on one objective: "to retain their inheritance from their fathers; to adhere to the worship of Israel's traditional god, Yahweh; to reject all heathen influence; and to utilize the time of their exile to enable them to understand their hard fate until they could ultimately return" (Otzen 1990: 10). This focused attitude with limited foreign religious influences as well as the fact that the Judeans remained in Palestine ensured "excellent prospects for the continued development of Judean religion and culture" (1990: 10). David's heirs occupied the throne in Jerusalem for 400 years thereafter (Otzen 1990: 9).

For over a thousand years from around the middle of the first millennium BC, the Mediterranean world experienced the emergence of great political forces. The Assyrians became the first great empire around 750 BC. The capital of the northern Israelite kingdom, Samaria, was captured by them in 722 BC. The kingdom was split up into a number of smaller provinces which were in turn integrated into the Assyrian empire. In an attempt to reduce the possibility of a civil rebellion, the Assyrians deported key citizens such as administration officials, priests, prominent citizens and tradesmen. They also settled foreign deportees from other conquered areas into Palestine further reducing the risk of a rebellion. The

political balance of power changed when the Babylonians replaced them around 600 BC. The Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar captured Jerusalem in 587 BC, destroying the temple in the process and assimilating the southern kingdom into his empire thereby ensuring them the same fate that befell the northern kingdom. In terms of Revelation, Babylon became the epitome of evil in the same way that the Roman Empire was viewed in the apocalyptic literature to the extent that the one, namely Babylon, became a symbol of the other, the Roman Empire. As mentioned previously the Judeans were a much more focused group than the Jews from the northern kingdom. When the Persian king Cyrus (from southern Iran) defeated the Babylonians in 540 BC, the small Jewish community in Babylon was offered the opportunity to return to Palestine. The return to Palestine, by those leaders who took advantage of this opportunity resulted in the re-establishment of a central administration in Jerusalem, the religious cult and the rebuilding of the temple which was completed in 516 BC. The Persian policy of religious tolerance and the Persian king's personal support, financial and otherwise, to rebuild the temple was significant in ensuring that the politico-religious ideology of the Israelites was restored.

Alexander the Great's conquests around 330 BC made the Greeks the dominant world political force prior to the Christian era. A turning point in history, Alexander's conquests spread Greek influence to a large part of the world. A consequence of these conquests was the domination of Palestine by the Egyptian Ptolemies. The shape and political structure of states took on a whole new face in the form of the famous Greek city-state concept, the *polis*. Democratic by nature, the *polis* functioned with administrators, military leaders and traders ensuring great wealth and economic advancement. The Romans took over and enforced their political hegemony on the Mediterranean region from the first century prior to the Christian era until the Middle Ages.

4.2 Political Structures of the Roman Empire

In order to understand the political structures that existed during the time of Jesus, our focus would have to be primarily on the Roman political structure as the prevailing world power at the time. The Roman political structure, political ideology and relations with Jews and Christians also become politically significant for another reason. Revelation becomes a monumental struggle between good and evil with good ultimately in triumph. For the early Christians Rome became the symbol of evil in its most hideous form. While the birth of Jesus took place during the period known as the Early Roman Empire, there was a phase in Roman history, known as the Roman Republic that considerably influenced the political structures that came into existence with the reign of Augustus. The reign of Augustus (31 BC - 14 AD) and Tiberius (14 - 37 AD) would cover the life of Jesus. The analysis would not be complete if we were to ignore developments within the Jewish community of which Jesus was a part. This necessitates a close look at the political structures of Jewish client kings such as Herod the Great, his sons Archelaus, Phillip and Herod Antipas who inherited their father's kingdom after

his death in 4 BC as well as the political structures of the early governors of Rome, notably Pontius Pilate who ruled from 26 - 36 AD. By the time of Jesus' birth, Rome's political influence had already penetrated significantly the social structures of the entire Mediterranean basin. In a sense it could be compared to Alexander's hellenisation of the world.

While the Greeks were proud of their democratic institutions that developed over time and in the twentieth century has become a significant political ideology, Ferguson describes the Roman constitutional system as "a perfect balance of the monarchic (consul), oligarchic (senate), and democratic (assemblies) elements" (1993: 20). The political system of the Roman republic was held together by a fear of the gods as manifested in traditional rites (1993: 20). Roman religious piety contributed significantly to Rome's power. The following point from Cicero illustrates this point well: "We have excelled neither Spain in population, nor Gaul in vigor, nor Carthage in versatility, nor Greece in art, nor, indeed Italy and Latium itself in the innate sensibility characteristic of this land and its peoples, but in piety, in devotion to religion, ... we have excelled every race and every nation" (Ferguson 1993: 20). Rome had the ability to borrow cultural and religious elements from other states and effectively turn them into its own. Rome's appeal to the foreign gods of enemy states to turn sides, through its ceremony of *evocatio*, with a promise of greater faithfulness is a reflection of the significance of religion in its political ideology. Rome's political genius was reflected in its excellent legal system in which magistrates had absolute power or *imperium*. Religious law (*fas*) and civil law (*Ius*) were combined and remained the domain of ruling bodies within the political structure. South Africa's legal system is based on Roman Dutch law which is a reflection of the impact that the Roman legal system had on the world. Roman political structures were people orientated and ensured a high standard of moral authority within the senate, not to be confused with the immoral and paganistic rule that became so characteristic of the empire. The Roman republic came to an end around 30 BC ushering in a new political structural arrangement initiated by the Emperor Augustus.

By the time Augustus, previously known as Octavian, assumed power, the Roman Empire had a number of needs that required urgent attention. In his political restructuring, Augustus focused on the following areas of need: a strong central policy for the Empire as a whole, building morale and garnering support from the governing class and creating a climate of order and stability. Through his constitutional settlement (*res gestae*) in 27 BC, he ensured that his power and prestige - referred to as *auctoritas* (extra constitutional power) - exceeded everyone else's. The "final legal definition of the new constitutional arrangement" in 23 BC ensured his status as *imperium maius* of the provincial army granting him proconsular power of the provinces even in his absence. This status together with the *tribunicia potestas*, "power of the tribunate" made Augustus a legal and powerful Emperor. As *princeps senatus*, (from 28 BC), "he had the right to speak first in debate" (Ferguson 1993: 28). His pursuit of peace resulted in safety and

security “that made possible travel, trade, and renewed economic development and prosperity” (1993: 28). His *pax romana* (peace pact) and *ara pacis* (altar of peace) became critical political philosophies that ensured the continued prosperity of the Roman Empire. His assumption of the office of *pontifex maximus* in 12 BC in order to restore the religion of Rome is a reflection of the Roman political ideology that was prevalent in his day. Despite his noble efforts at peace, Augustus introduced a government that was representative of a “delegated absolutism” and could at best be described as a “revolutionary tyranny” (Ferguson 1993: 28).

As Rome was no longer a republic, but rather an empire, the political structure of the Empire would be significantly different to that of a “localised” state with clearly defined borders encompassing a homogeneous community. Merrill Tenney describes the vastness of the Roman Empire as follows: “at the time when the New Testament was written, the entire civilized world, with the exception of the little-known kingdoms of the Far East, was under the domination of Rome. From the Atlantic Ocean on the west to the Euphrates River and the Red Sea on the east, and from the Rhone, the Danube, the Black Sea, and the Caucasus mountains on the north to the Sahara on the south, stretched one vast empire under the headship and virtual dictatorship of the emperor, called both ‘King’ (1 Pet. 2: 17) and ‘Augustus’ (Luke 2: 1) in the New Testament” (1985: 3). Based on a political ideology that was a compromise between the republican political philosophy and the dictatorship of Julius Caesar, the power of the imperial state of Rome was experienced far and wide.

Ferguson describes the administration of the Empire as involving the cities, provinces and client kingdoms over which Rome held sway, each with its own unique political structure (1993: 39). The Roman Empire was primarily made up of a collection of cities as far as power and government was concerned. Cities were classified in terms of the privileges they enjoyed. At the top of the list were “colonies of Roman citizens” that catered for military veterans. These cities were known as the *coloniae civium romanorum* and included New Testament cities such as Philippi, Corinth, Antioch, Pisidia, Iconium, Lystra and Troas. The cities known as the *municipia* or *oppida civium romanorum* (towns of Roman citizens) were next in line because they held the Roman franchise. The so called “Latin towns” could obtain a Roman franchise by holding a Roman magistracy in the local government. Cities such as Ephesus, Smyrna, Tarsus and Antioch did not possess any privileges, but considered themselves as free, being under their own rules.

Municipal government in the cities of the west emulated Roman government. While the most senior ranking officials under the Republic were the two consuls who were elected annually, the highest ranking office in the city in the time of the empire was the city prefect (*praefectus urbi*). The praetors, who acted as judges until their terms expired, followed in rank. They subsequently filled administrative posts. Financial functions were performed by quaestors as the lowest rank that allowed entry into the senate. Public works and services were performed by

aediles that were non-senatorial staff. Ferguson further describes the difference in government bureaucracy between the non-Roman cities mentioned above, and the Roman towns in the west. The latter had two most senior ranking officials as chief magistrates, i.e. *duovirs* modeled on the two consuls in Rome and assisted by two *aediles* overseeing public works and buildings. The quaestors looked after the financial administration of the town while a local council made up of former magistrates acted like the senate in Rome. The difference in political ideology between the cities of east and west was that while the west zealously tried to imitate Roman constitutional structures, the east expressed loyalty to Rome by extending divine honours such as the deification of Augustus. It was this type of action that resulted in strong protest from the early Christians and that subsequently led to their large scale persecution. A city such as Athens succeeded in retaining its democratic political ideology in many of its legislative and judicial decisions. The court of Areopagus played a significant role within the political structures of the eastern Mediterranean cities. Initially limited to jurisdiction in capital crimes, later the principal governing structure in Athens, it eventually came to regulate educational and religious matters. A further notable political structure characteristic of Greek cities in the east was the *politeuma*, “a self-governing division of the city based on nationality”. Structured around “a religious center, a council and magistrates, division of citizens into tribes, and other features of the Greek polis”, the *politeuma* was also characteristic of the Alexandrian Jews’ political structure (Ferguson 1993: 41).

Roman provinces were initially regarded as units of authority and later became geographical designations. The constitutional settlement achieved by Augustus in 27 BC stipulated that the administration of the provinces were the co-responsibility of the emperor and the senate. The proconsul referred to in Acts 19: 38, acted as provincial governor and was elected from the corps of former magistrates. Through his *maius imperium*, obtained in 23 BC, Augustus could intervene in the affairs of any province as he chose. In imperial provinces where Roman legions were stationed, Augustus was assisted by a senator who, as his legate, acted as governor. Financial affairs were administered by a quaestor in senatorial provinces while a procurator, an official of equestrian rank, did the financial administration in a military province. Smaller provinces such as Judea were under the control of a praefectus who acted as governor. Pontius Pilate, as governor of Judea, was such a controlling officer with responsibility and authority over military, financial and judicial affairs according to Ferguson.

The *concilium*, an intermediate organisation, consisting of representatives of the cities or tribes within a province was, according to Ferguson, “a channel to Rome for exposing the views of the local ruling classes” (1993: 43). Wielding considerable political influence, the *concilia* performed the important function of advancing the imperial cult. Ferguson describes the imperial cult as follows: “offering cult to the emperor’s accompanying *genius* or the divine *numen* within him, elevating the imperial family to a divine status, making dedications to a deity

and to the emperor, relating various divinities to the emperors as his protectors and helpers, and personifying the qualities and the benefactions of the emperor” (1993: 197). Julius Caesar and Augustus were regarded as Roman gods.

A third political entity within the Roman political structure was the client kingdoms of the east. In their book, *Power, Politics and the Making of the Bible: An Introduction*, Robert and Mary Coote introduces Roman rule in the client kingdoms of the near East with the following statement: “In making the Mediterranean a Roman lake and hammering together the greatest empire the world would know for fifteen hundred years, Rome reset the geopolitical pattern of the Near East” (1990: 96). By the time of Jesus’ birth, Herod the Great was king of Judea, a client kingdom of the Roman Empire. His rule was established in 37 BC with Roman assistance. Herod (Matt. 2: 1) and his three sons (Acts 12: 1, 25: 13) ruled Palestine, in a client relationship with Rome, during the life of Jesus. A ruthless leader who depended on Roman support for his legitimacy and who had no regard for priestly authority, he sustained his kingship and met political challenges from the Hasmoneans through convenient marriages and the murder of even his closest family members (i.e. two of his sons, his wife’s grandfather, Hercanus, and her brother were all murdered by him). Herod guarded his position jealously and dealt with any threat to his position violently. Matthew Chapter 2 records his slaughter of innocent infants in order to eliminate the Messiah whom he regarded as a threat to his political position. Otzen describes both Herod and his father Antipater as wealthy with Herod using that wealth “to offer appropriate bribes to the Roman politicians” (1990: 35). The Romans on the other hand recognised Herod as an able man with the political will, ambition and intelligence to deal with their problems on the eastern flank of the empire. Herod’s relationship with the Jews was strained. Religion and culture always played a critical role in the political ideology of the Israelites. As an Edomite, the Jews felt that Herod did not have a meaningful relationship with neither their religion nor their culture. This was confirmed in his attitude to and destruction of the priestly authority.

As a client kingdom of Rome, the kings of Palestine owed their title to the Emperor of Rome. Other than that they were free to organise their own internal administration, collect their own taxes and command their own armies. Foreign policy matters were under the jurisdiction of the empire and the client kingdoms were severely limited in this regard. Important functions that the client kingdoms were to perform for Rome included supporting the Roman military when requested to do so, securing the frontiers through the maintenance of order and security and the payment of taxes to Rome. They played a key role in protecting trade routes, acting as a buffer zone between barbarians and the empire and generally serving Rome’s interests (Ferguson 1993: 43, 44).

The political structures under Herod’s reign were also a clear manifestation of the stressful relationship he had with his own subjects, the Jews. He ignored the employment of local people in his political structures, but instead based his ruling

class on foreigners (Coote & Coote 1990: 97). While his most trusted advisor was a Spartan, his army was commandeered by Greeks and Romans. The wealthy Judean community of Babylon supplied him with a few Jewish officers and private tutors for his family. As mentioned previously, the Jewish religious cult felt the harshness of Herod's rule in his attempt to reduce the influence of the priests. High priests, with very short terms in office, were drawn from prestigious Alexandrian and Babylonian Judeans with little connection to Palestinian Jews (1990: 97). Otzen records that Herod's struggle was not only confined to the Hasmoneans, but was also directed to earlier designated leaders of the Jewish community. This was demonstrated in the flippant manner in which he handled the office of high priest. On assumption of power he had forty-five members of the nucleus of the Council of Elders (the Sanhedrin) executed on a false claim that they supported the Hasmoneans (Otzen 1990: 39). As a result of this the institution was left without influence during the rest of his reign.

The impact on the Sanhedrin was considerable as they were referred to as the council of seventy with the high priest in charge of the council. They exercised executive, judicial and academic authority. An emerging politico-religious force Herod had to contend with was the Pharisees who openly despised his rulership and preferred direct Roman leadership. They "sought to impose their interpretation of the law upon the nation" (Ferguson 1993: 481), and were regarded as very legalistic. Their influence were at grassroots level ensuring their survival into modern Judaism. In opposition to the Pharisees stood the Sadducees who were composed of Jewish aristocracy who aligned their political views with that of Rome. As a conservative group, "they combined conservative religious attitudes with power politics" (Ferguson 1993: 486). They were open to certain Hellenistic practices and rejected Pharisaic interpretations of the law.

Herod's administration, according to Robert Gundry was characterised by "secret police, curfew and high taxes, but also free grain during famine and free clothing in other calamities" (1994: 32). His most notable achievement, in an attempt to placate his subjects, was the financing and building of an elaborate temple despite him not sharing the Jewish religious faith. So elaborate was the temple that it "became proverbial for its splendor: 'Whoever has not seen the temple of Herod has seen nothing beautiful'" (Gundry 1994: 32). Characterised by a rulership that was both successful and tragic, Herod died on 1 April 4 BC. The Judeans unsuccessfully petitioned Augustus to discontinue Herodian rule. Their plea to reconstitute the former temple-constitution with internal autonomy under a governorship appointed by Augustus was ignored. As such they did not have the opportunity to restore their unique political ideology that was so prevalent under ancient Israel.

Augustus after much deliberation divided Herod the Great's kingdom amongst his sons. They received a lesser title than their father. Archelaus as ethnarch ruled Judea, Samaria and Idumea and is incidentally referred to in Matthew 2: 22 as the

reason that God informed Joseph in a dream to retreat to Galilee. He was deposed by Augustus in 6 AD due to complaints received from the Jewish and Samaritan leaders about his unpopular rule. This resulted in the appointment of Roman governors for the period 6 - 14 AD over this region with the most notable governor being Pontius Pilate who presided over the trial of Jesus. Earlier in this assignment, I referred to the political structures of the province and the responsibilities of Pontius Pilate as governor of the province. Phillip, brother of Archelaus, was made tetrarch of Batanea, Trachonitis and Auranitis. His rule characterised as just and fair extended for almost 40 years until 34 AD. Their brother Antipas became tetrarch of Galilee and Perea and ruled until 39 AD (Tenney 1998: 35, 36). Herod Antipas, according to Tenney, is most prominent in the Gospels. Jesus' reference to him as a fox (or more appropriately a vixen) demonstrates his craftiness, slyness and vindictiveness (1998: 36). According to Otzen, John the Baptist (Perea) and Jesus (Galilee) was active in Herod Antipas' kingdom around the year 30 (1990: 40). He was responsible for the death of John the Baptist. Tenney records that the political structures of Antipas' government was modeled on the Greek political system (Tenney 1985: 36).

4.3 Consequences of Roman Political Ideology

Although Palestine was in a client relationship with Rome and even though Roman Imperial rule was indirect while Herod and his sons ruled Palestine or parts thereof, Roman political ideology had a significant impact on the lives of people. The services of high priestly rulers were in most cases in conflict with the interests of the people. This was exacerbated by the disdain with which Herod, the Great treated the priestly class. Richard Horsley argues that the economic burdens forced on the peasantry through a tribute to Caesar and high taxation by the Herodian client rulers resulted significantly in the collapse of local and family life (1993: 395). Despite the fact that Judea was more of a strategic value to Rome rather than an "exploitative economic value", Horsley comments that tribute and numerous tolls were nevertheless extracted consistently (1993: 399). Horsley further describes the extent and effects of this economic exploitation as follows: "Effects of imperial exploitation also began to break down the traditional socioeconomic infrastructure on which the society was based. Most fundamental and significant for its impact in other ways was the economic pressure brought on the peasantry for taxes and tribute. Rising indebtedness of the peasants led to loss of their land that was the base of their economic subsistence and of their place in the traditional social structure" (1993: 401). The reference to taxation in Romans 13 points to the sensitivity of this practice as it became a powerful tool of oppression. Augustus is credited with attempting to put in place an adequate tax collection system. He therefore instituted a periodic census (Luke 2:1) in order to determine the exact resources available to the empire. Ferguson identifies the forms of direct taxation as the *tributa*, a tax collected by the governor and his employees, the *tributum soli*, an agricultural based tax and the *tributum capitis* directed at other property owners (1997: 87). Indirect taxes were in the form of *vectigalia* (cf. *telos* in Matt. 17:25) and were collected mainly for income

purposes. The system was open for corruption. The collection of taxes by the *publicani* was structured in such a way that they paid a fixed sum to the government and any amounts above this is regarded as profit. Zacchaeus and Matthew are two prominent tax collectors mentioned in the Gospels. The Jewish people were generally dissatisfied with tax collectors because of the potential for corruption and the heavy burden the Roman system placed on them as well as the fact that the tax collectors represented the Roman system. Herod's unpopularity lay not only in the fact that he was an Edomite, but also his intensification of this exploitation. His attempts to impress his imperial masters and embrace Hellenistic ideals resulted in his Jewish building program and support for Hellenistic cultural causes at the expense of his Jewish subjects. This exploitation according to Horsley continued under the regimes of the Roman governors and Jewish high priests.

Given the extent of exploitation, it is not surprising that God's timing with regard to Jesus' emergence within this environment is so significant. Horsley describes Galilee as a society of "very rich and very poor people and has been portrayed in the Gospels as such (1993: 403). He views Jesus' parables as "(giving) us illuminating insights into the socioeconomic conditions resulting from generations of intense economic pressure" (1993: 403). Horsley describes the kingdom of God as "the use of power, in 'mighty deeds', to liberate, establish, or protect the people in difficult historical circumstances such as the exodus from bondage in Egypt" (1993: 409). Jesus' proclamation of the kingdom of God, seen by Horsley as a political metaphor and symbol, is concerned with the conditions of the people as they faced imperial oppression from one day to the next. The kingdom of God as presented by Jesus therefore reflects in its ideology a socio-economic-political dimension of human relations as purposed by the will of God. These dimensions are inseparable from the religious making Horsley to conclude that both God's activity and Jesus' preaching can be regarded as political clearly directed at the oppressive imperial political ideology as it prevailed in Palestine at the time (1993: 410, 411). Jesus' concern for the plight of the poor did not result in his disrespect for the governing authorities. This is clearly demonstrated in his response to the challenge of the Pharisees and Herodians to "give Caesar's property back to Caesar; give God what belongs to God" (Mark 12:17). The kingdom of God therefore represented a new socio-political order with "God restoring the life of the society, and that this would mean judgement for those who oppressed the people and vindication for those who faithfully adhered to God's will and responded to the kingdom" (1993: 426).

5. Political Structures in Romans 13

One of the most difficult tasks faced by any biblical scholar is the reconciliation of Paul's text, Romans 13:1-7 with the prevailing political situation in Rome at the time of his writing. Ferguson confirms that the text of Romans 13 was written during the reign of Nero between 54 and 68 AD (1993: 33). A number of concerns come to mind immediately. My first consideration would be to determine the social and political milieu within which the Jews and early Christians found themselves. Would there have been any reason for Paul to motivate good political conduct and responsible relations with a state on the part of a Christian, especially in view of the large-scale persecution suffered by Christians? Secondly it would be important to gain an exegetical understanding of the text, in order to determine the kind of political structures envisaged by Paul. A third and final concern for me is the justification of the textual ideology to modern abusive political structures. Does it really make sense for a Christian to subject him or herself to an evil and abusive political system that does not in any way glorify God or represent His divine nature?

5.1 Political Background

Justo L. González (1984: 10) refers to two fundamental tenets that were very important for all Jews. Ethical monotheism and eschatological hope were two very important elements in Jewish religion that influenced their political world view. Ethical monotheism focuses on Yahweh as the only true God that commands proper worship and decent relationships amongst human beings. Eschatological hope on the other hand envisaged a fulfillment of God's promises and His intervention in order to restore Israel from political oppression and establish His kingdom of peace and justice. While most Jewish people felt that they could leave their destiny entirely in Yahweh's hands, there were those who were strongly convinced that they should speed things up by means of force and through rebellions. Tenney describes this turbulence on part of the Jews as especially prevalent "when their religious freedom was threatened" (1998: 114).

The conflict between the Jews and the imperial state of Rome was sporadic. The Maccabean revolt against the Syrian Seleucids around 160 BC ensured political and religious success and freedom for the Jewish people. The political freedom achieved after this initial revolt is described by Otzen as considerable in that it extended right through the Hasmonean period until the birth of Jesus. Perhaps of greater significance, in my opinion, was the struggle for religious freedom. There was an unceasing effort on the part of orthodox Jews to redefine Judaism in terms of the historical Jewish tradition. Otzen is of the view that the purification process that the Jewish religion was subjected to over time, resulted in the Jews managing to settle the relationship between state authority and religion. This, in Otzen's opinion, contributed to the fact that the Jewish religion survived the collapse of the Jewish state (1990: 18). The Jewish populace's relationship with Herod the Great was not in the least amiable. The tensions between Herod and the Jewish people

were mainly a result of his flirtation with Hellenism and flippant manner in which he dealt with the office of high priest.

In general the Roman attitude towards Jewish religion was one of great sensitivity as long as they were in a position to extract the necessary taxes. This was however not always the case. Ferguson asserts that while Herod's insensitive handling of the office of high priest was to ensure greater control, the Roman governors made frequent changes to the office of high priest for their personal enrichment. Pontius Pilate (26-36 AD) attempted to promote the concept of imperial cult worship by introducing images of the emperor to Jerusalem. This arrogant attitude only served to anger the Jews and in the face of a public defiant demonstration, he was forced to relent. The Jews however were not that fortunate when Pilate at a later stage, used funds from the Korban, a sacred treasury for the Jews, to build an aqueduct into Jerusalem. Jewish protest was met with violent response by Roman soldiers. In a later incident Pilate's dedication of shields bearing his name and that of Tiberius, the emperor, was an attempt to annoy Jewish religious sensitivities (Ferguson 1993: 392/3). The reign of Gaius Caligula (37 - 41 AD) was characterised by conflict with the Jews (Ferguson 1993:31). This tension derived from the appointment of another Herodian ruler, Agrippa 1, over northeast Palestine by Caligula and was further exacerbated by his disdain for Jewish religion and customs. This indignant attitude on the part of Gaius resulted in him ordering a statue of himself to be erected in the Jewish temple in Jerusalem. With the potential to violate Jewish sensibilities in a major way and breaking with the traditional imperial approach, Caligula's orders were fortunately never carried out. Agrippa however attempted to remain in the favour of the Jews by observing their customs and dealing with anyone who were regarded as a threat to Jewish religion such as beheading James, the son of Zebedee and the imprisonment of Peter as recorded in Acts 12 (Ferguson 1993: 395). Around 51 AD, the Emperor Claudius expelled the Jews from Rome as a result of their disorderly conduct attributed to one "Chrestus", which historians agree was Christ (González 1984: 32)

There was a distinction between the Jews and the early Christians with respect to customs and religion. In fact the early Christians regarded themselves as Jews with one fundamental difference, which is their acceptance that Jesus was the Messiah. This internal conflict within Judaism, confined as such by the Roman authorities, led to the expulsion of the Jews from Rome. González accounts for the increase in Jewish nationalism, which resulted in greater rebelliousness to Rome, and the growth of Christianity, particularly from Gentile ranks, to the fact that Christians distanced themselves from the Jews. This emerging distinction between the two religions was recognised by the Roman authorities and as a result "this new consciousness was at the root of two-and-a-half centuries of persecution by the Roman Empire, from the time of Nero to the conversion of Constantine" (González 1984: 33). The political relations that the Jews had with imperial Rome was generally considered to be peaceful except for those instances when their religious practices and sensitivities were challenged. Their reactions to these

challenges were extremely vociferous and at times violent. As the distinction became clearer between the two religions, the Christians began to suffer tremendously under persecution from both Jewish religious leaders and the Roman imperial state. Sanders alludes to the fact that opposition to the new faith came from the chief priests (Acts 4:1) and confirms the execution of James, the brother of Jesus, on the orders of Ananas, the Sadducean high priest. Paul's conversion happened on his trip to Damascus to capture converted Jews (Acts 9:1-2) on the orders of the Sadducean high priest in terms of Acts 5:17 (Sanders 1991:8). Persecution of the Christians under the Roman Empire was conducted with great cruelty under the reign of Nero.

Paul's exhortation to every believer to be subject to their rulers as divine representatives happened after the initial conflict between Jews and the state and just prior to Nero's large-scale persecution of Christians (after 64 AD). The letter to the Romans was written around 53 AD (Sanders 1991:14). As Paul died around 62 - 64 AD, would he have viewed political structures and relations of Christians to the governing authorities differently? There is no indication that he would have as he died a persecuted Christian.

5.2 The Nature of Political Structures in Romans 13

• *Understanding Paul's Political Perspective*

Ernst Käsemann describes the political structures that Paul had in mind with the following statement: "As the apostle's terminology shows, he has in view very different local and regional authorities and he is not so much thinking of institutions as of organs and functions, ranging from the text collector to the police, magistrates, and Roman officials" (1980: 354). This according to Käsemann refers to those who wield power in a regional or central administration that the common man would liaise with. In this context there is no reference by Paul to the Roman Empire. This seems to be odd in view of the turbulent Jewish-Christian relationship with the imperial state and especially in view of the fact that this text was written after the first wave of Christian persecution. According to Yoder (1972: 193), "the text served as a sort of capsule constitution to guide the Christian statesman (who should punish evil and reward good) and the Christian citizen (who should conscientiously obey). The traditional church view on this passage was that this section unequivocally guided Christian relations with the state. As such it was considered binding. This according to Käsemann has not only resulted in conservative, but also "reactionary views even to the point of political fanaticism" (1980:354). What seems to negate this approach is Paul's almost deafening silence on possible civil conflicts and limits of political authority. Paul also does not provide an appropriate response for a Christian faced with a tyrannical or selfish and bad government, a feature more characteristic of modern political regimes. Achtemeier in his commentary on Romans 13:1-7 asks the following question: "Is the Christian under obligation to support whatever policies the governing authorities may deem appropriate, whether those policies are for the good of the people or simply for the purpose of keeping those governing

authorities in power?" (1985: 203). Arguing their support for Christian allegiance to Adolph Hitler, a group of "German Christians" in the German Protestant church held to this view of unqualified subordination. They drew moral justification from Luther's interpretation of the text: "Christians should not refuse, under the pretext of religion, to obey men, especially evil ones" (1985: 204). Could either Paul or Luther have foreseen the extermination of six million Jews or the large-scale destruction of human dignity and life in the twentieth century? On the other hand if they had witnessed these events, would they have made their views known? While there are no easy answers to these questions, I believe that Achtemeier's exposition of the text gives a more balanced view on the political ideology conveyed in the text. She addresses issues such as whether or not Christians are obligated to give unqualified and unconditional obedience to governments, whether or not God would grant power to any governing authority irrespective of the means whereby they assumed power and whether or not all governments can equally claim divine sanction in terms of these verses.

Paul confirms in verse 2 of the text that order is derived from God with chaos and disorder standing in opposition to Him. At the centre of that created and divine good order is the ordering of human affairs by God. As Christians our freedom from the law does not in any way imply a freedom from civil law (Achtemeier 1985: 204). This makes it obligatory for Christians to conduct themselves in an orderly fashion at all times. According to Achtemeier, "it clearly means that Christians may not frivolously disregard civil authority, as though the freedom from law, won from them by Christ's death included freedom from all civil law as well" (1985:204). For Achtemeier obedience is not dependent on whether or not the governing authority in question acknowledges their God-given purpose. This is immaterial as they could either way still fulfill God's purpose as referred to by Paul. In the promotion of good and the punishment of evil (vv. 2b - 4), governing authorities are to be obeyed as God's servants, fulfilling His ultimate purposes. This further places an obligation on the Christian to meet whatever dues he is responsible for, such as the payment of taxes. The freedom of an individual therefore becomes relative in the creation of an ordered and decent civil society as well as the opposition to a chaotic civil existence.

Achtemeier argues that the governing authority is relativized through the language of the text at the same time when the call for obedience is made (1985: 205). It would be inappropriate for a governing authority to claim divine prerogatives as it is serving as God's servant in order to promote good and restrain evil. By claiming divine status, such authorities according to Achtemeier, stand in idolatrous opposition to God and immediately ceases to function under God's authority. Furthermore, Achtemeier's interpolation of the text suggests a nullification of divine authority in the event of a state falling short of performing its functions of upholding good and destroying evil. It is his view that a reversal of these roles, i.e. the promotion of evil and the punishment of good citizens by a governing authority, pushes such an authority out of the realm of God's purposes. Quoting

Calvin: "... tyrannies, and unjust exercise of power, as they are full of disorder, are not an ordained government..." (1985: 205), Achtemeier confirms the view that Paul not only gives a description of what a governing authority is, but is also prescriptive in what such an authority should be. Paul therefore addresses both the limits of power of a governing authority as well as the duties of obedience incumbent upon a Christian. A government falling outside God's scope of servanthood therefore does not command the obedience of its subjects. Christians are therefore not obliged to obey such governments. Based on the above analysis, Paul affirms the divine authority that political structures attain if they pursue the ultimate good. The lordship of God extends over his entire creation "and nothing in that creation, religious or secular, is beyond the power and purposes of God" (Achtemeier 1985:206). In terms of what I would refer to as Pauline political ideology, the Christian has an obligation to both the civil authorities as well as to God while the civil authorities are accountable to God for good governance. In the event of a conflict between God's divine purposes and a civil authority's obligations in terms of those divine purposes, the Christian's duty would be to follow God's precepts. Achtemeier sums it up quite succinctly with the following statement: "Obedience to civil authority is a Christian duty, but it is to be exercised within the framework of the Christian's more far-reaching commitment of obedience to God" (1985: 206).

Yoder distinguishes between the "positivistic" view and the "normative" view. (1972: 200). The "positivistic" view of the text was upheld by Luther's interpretation and subsequently the "German Christian's" support of Hitler's regime as a divinely instituted authority. As alive as it was in "popular piety and patriotism" (1972: 200), this view accepted that all governments including that of Adolf Hitler was revealed and providentially instituted by God. Yoder notes a weakness in the "positivistic" view that is based on the absence of "affirmative moral judgement on the existence of a particular government..." (1972: 201). The "normative view" on the other hand, is more firmly entrenched in the Calvinistic tradition with support from Huldrych Zwingli, Cromwell, Karl Barth and Emil Brunner (1972: 201). This view promotes the idea that the text advances a course for proper government in principle and does not focus on a particular government as such. A government may therefore only claim divine sanction if it meets God's requirements of a divine institution. Failure to do so would mean losing God's authority to claim divine authorisation therefore making such a government unjust and illegitimate with no claim to popular subordination. These views strongly correspond with those of Achtemeier in his interpretation of the text. Huldrych Zwingli (1484 - 1531), the leader of the Swiss Reformation, strongly advocated the moral obligation on the part of Christians to wage a just rebellion against unjust and evil governments. This, in Yoder's view, forms the basis of political struggles (i.e. Liberation and Black Theology) for just governments in Latin America and Africa against colonial oppression. Once again we are faced with a shortcoming in the "normative" view in that there are no guidelines as to what would be appropriate rules to classify the disqualification of a state. In "normative" thought

the good state in Romans 13 is contrasted with the evil state in Revelation 13 and used as a yardstick to measure any governing authority. Yoder further makes the point that God did “not create or institute or ordain” political powers, but he merely ordered them. Ever since the existence of man, his social organisation has been one of hierarchy, authority and power and as result of sin his political authority has been tainted with “domination, disrespect for human dignity and real or potential violence” (1972: 203). Heywood defines power as “the ability to influence the behaviour of others, typically through the power to reward or punish” (1997: 411). God’s ordering of human civil authority does not imply his moral approval of what such an authority does.

- *Romans 13 in Context to the Roman Empire*

The purpose of the text to the social context of the Jewish Christians in Rome was to discourage them from rebelling against the Roman Empire or even to consider rejection of this corrupt pagan authority. Paul’s address is directed at Roman Christians. He does not cover the entire spectrum of political reality and neither does he pursue an ideal and divine social order (Yoder: 1972: 202, 203 & 204). Yoder sums it up as follows: “The immediate concrete meaning of this text for the Christian Jews in Rome, in the face of official anti-Semitism and the rising arbitrariness of the Imperial regime, is to call them away from any notion of revolution or insubordination. The call is for a non resistant attitude toward a tyrannical government “(1972:204).

Neil Elliot asserts that the purpose of the letter to the Romans was “to oppose (the) gentile-Christian ‘boasting’ over Israel and the corresponding indifference to the plight of real Jews in Rome in the wake of the Claudian expulsion” (1997:190). Elliot makes a strong case for Paul’s concern with the fate that Roman Christians might suffer in the light of Jewish protests and the violent imperial reactions to these protests. “Paul meant simply to deflect the Roman Christians from the trajectory of anti-Jewish attitudes and ideology along which they were already traveling, a trajectory which would implicate them ever more in the scapegoating of the Jews already visible in Roman culture - a scapegoating that would become a mainstay of Christian orthodoxy within a generation” (Elliot 1997:196). These motives seem to strongly underscore and support Paul’s apparently “absurd” statement to be subordinate and honour a governing authority such as the corrupt, violent and paganistic Roman Empire. That this text stands in sharp contrast to Paul’s exhortations elsewhere in Romans is rather puzzling and has kept scholars locked in debate for a considerable period of time. In Romans 12: 17-21 Paul anticipates the coming persecution of Christians and in 13: 11-13 he exhorts them to “cast off the works of darkness” that is so prevalent in the present evil age. In Romans 12: 2 they are instructed not to be conformed to this world. Concluding that the text of Romans 13: 1-7 “appear (to be) a foreign body”, Elliot sees the rhetorical structure of the text functioning to encourage Christians to submit to the governing authorities, rather than react out of desperation and suffer the full military might of the state. Paul’s concern was the continued spreading of the

gospel and the growth of the new faith. While martyrdom is an accepted and ultimately divine rewarding experience, the gospel could only be spread through living and breathing individuals. It is perhaps this heritage that Paul wanted to preserve and as a result his exhortations appear to be some what “absurd” against the stark background of gross Roman imperial injustice. If the survival and advancement of Christianity was dependent on the political submission of the early Christians to the governing authorities, I would accept that Paul’s political ideological motivation was specific and selective in so far as it applied to the prevailing socio-political climate. I agree with Achtemeier’s relativization theory that it is not implied that as Christians, we are obliged to be subordinate to bad political structures. Our methods of resistance to bad government should also however reflect our Christian nature as a peace loving and constructive belief system that will support any political structure that pursues the ultimate good as defined by God.

6. Political Structures in the Book of Revelation

Classified as apocalyptic literature, the book of Revelation had its origin in true apocalyptic literature style during a time of persecution and oppression. Tenney describes apocalyptic literature as characterised “(1) by an intense despair of present circumstances and an equally intense hope of divine intervention in the future; (2) by the use of symbolic language, dreams, and visions; (3) by the introduction of celestial and demonic powers as messengers and agents in the progress of God’s purpose; (4) by the prediction of a catastrophic judgement of the wicked and of a supernatural deliverance for the righteous; and (5) frequently by the pseudonymous ascription of the writing to a prominent character of biblical history, such as Ezra (II Esdras) or Enoch (The book of Enoch)” (1985: 383). The book of Revelation appears to meet all of the above requirements with the exception that the author declares his name right at the onset. Despite the fact that scholars are still at odds as to whom this John, the writer is, there is a general consensus that he was most certainly affected by the persecution of his day as his banishment to the island of Patmos proves. The entire book is characterised by strong images of famine, war, pestilence, economic disasters and persecution that result from the political ideologies and control of evil forces bent on the destruction of God’s divine authority. Ultimately the political ideology that emerges in an eternal divine state presided over by the Sovereign Lord himself.

6.1 Political Background and Methods of Interpretation

Two schools of thought prevail in the dating of the book of Revelation. On the one hand it is suggested that the number 666 (Revelation 13:18) “is the sum total of the numerical values of the Hebrew letters that spell *Neron Kesar*,” and as a result it is accepted that the person described in the chapter refers to Nero. Tenney is of the opinion that a lack of support from external tradition makes his claim too flimsy (1985: 383). On the other hand, the suggestion that the book can be dated during the reign of Domitian 81 to 96 AD is far more plausible according to Tenney. This is supported by external evidence in the form of a quotation from Irenaeus, in his book *Against Heresies V.XXX3* where he confirms that John acquired the vision “no very long time since, but almost in our day, towards the end of Domitian’s reign,” (1985: 384).

The great fire in Rome on the night of 18 June 64 AD ushered in an unprecedented era of Christian persecution for a period of two-and-a-half centuries. Nero, in an attempt to allay suspicions on his person, decided to blame the Christians with all the connotations associated with such an action (González 1984:35). The Roman historian Tacitus (*Annals* 15.44) gives us a description of the manner in which Christians were tortured and killed: “Before killing the Christians, Nero used them to amuse the people. Some were dressed in furs, to be killed by dogs. Others were crucified. Still others were set on fire early in the night, so that they might illumine it. Nero opened his own gardens for those shows...” (1984: 35). Nero’s death brought a temporary halt to Christian persecution.

Christian persecution by Domitian was most probably a result of their rejection of Roman gods and traditions in direct contrast to Domitian's dreams (González 1984: 36). Domitian's reign is further characterised by his insistence on the title *dominus et deus* ("lord and god") according to Everett Ferguson (1993:35). It was this insistence on deification that increased his tyrannical dictatorship and violent opposition to the growth of Christianity and "presaged the growth of social, economic, and religious conditions such as Revelation prophesied" (Tenney 1985: 384). The Church in Asia was particularly badly affected by these persecutions with "indications that many were killed" (González 1984: 37). Tenney describes Imperial Rome as representing "the model for the power of the state that Revelation depicted as the enemy of Christianity" (1985: 383). The universal rule of the Roman Emperors is represented by the beast that has "*authority over every tribe and people and tongue and nation*" according to Romans 13: 7. The book of Revelation sharply describes the growing hostility between the persecuted church and the pagan Roman Empire. Tenney describes the logical outcome of paganism as totalitarianism, involving ruler worship who in turn exercises a tight control over all political allegiance, economic resources, religious observances and all personal worship (1984: 384). While Paul, in Romans 13, instructs the Roman Christians to submit to the authority of Rome, as it had been divinely ordained, this same Roman authority is described in Revelation as "*the great harlot ... drunk with the blood of the saints and the blood of the martyrs of Jesus*" (Rev 17: 1,6). An understanding of the political structures envisioned in Revelation, necessitates an understanding of the various schools of interpretation. As apocalyptic literature, dominated by strong imagery and symbolism, Revelation is most certainly not an easy book to understand. A discussion of the political structures of the text as well as the political ideology it conveys can only be meaningful if undertaken within the context of a specific school of interpretation. Tenney identifies four main schools of interpretation very prominent amongst modern scholars (1985: 386-389).

The *Preterist School* has a very restrictive approach by limiting the application of the symbolism and imagery to the period of writing with no potential for "predictive prophecy" (1985: 386). Adela Collins refers to a spiritual or allegorical reading of Revelation that developed at the end of the 2nd century (1992: 706). Referred to as an "immanent" reading, in reaction to the earlier "imminent", prophetic- historical approach, it discouraged the interpretation of events as signs of the end. This approach, strongly advanced by personalities such as Augustine of Hippo, "did not eliminate the element of prophecy from Revelation entirely." The advantage of the *Preterist School*, according to Tenney, was certainly its focus on the historical events of the day. A school of interpretation, closely allied to the *Preterist School*, is the *Idealist School* that viewed Revelation as a monumental struggle between good and evil with Christianity and paganism cast in symbolism and imagery. Its focus is on ethical and spiritual truth with very little emphasis on the text's predictive value. The

Historicist School, strongly supported by Reformers such as Martin Luther, understood the text of Revelation as a description of the Church within the world and history. It describes in rich symbolism “the entire course of history of the church from Pentecost to the advent of Christ” (1985: 386). The destruction of the Roman Empire, the rise of Islam and the view of the papacy as representing the Antichrist are just some of the major interpretations of the school. The integrity of this literal approach seems to be based on Revelation 4: 1: “Come up hither, and I will show thee the things which must come to pass hereafter”. The *Futurist School* applies its interpretation of the first three chapters of Revelation as applicable to the time of writing or alternatively the seven churches of Asia as representative of seven eras. The remainder of the text is concerned with the “Great Tribulation” that will take place in a future setting.

The 17th century radical Puritan strain in England resulted in the eschatological interpretation of the book rather than a pure historical approach. The *postmillennial* view, initiated by Daniel Whitby and others in the 18th century, holds that following the destruction of Satan, a period of peace would precede the return of Christ. The *premillennial* view advocates the return of Christ, the resurrection of the righteous dead, the rule of a thousand years, suppression of the final rebellion, judgement of the wicked dead and the advent of the eternal state (1985: 388). The *amillennial* view does not subscribe to the literal interpretation of the millenium reign and therefore advocates that Christ could return at any time to judge the world and usher in his eternal blissful state. An analysis of the political structures prevalent in Revelation would certainly fall into one of the above approaches.

6.2 Political Structures Envisioned

While the initial interpretation of Revelation was applied to Rome, especially in view of the major conflict between church and state, current interpretation strategies as we have seen allow for both a historical as well as futuristic interpretation of the text. While I agree with Tenney that Rome was the model representative of the enemy of Christianity, this view in my opinion can be extended to include historical, modern and future governments whose political ideologies are in conflict with God’s divine requirements. Roman paganism and its vociferous persecution of Christians was the ultimate form of rebellion against God and as a result would evoke a dramatic response from God as only the symbolism and imagery of Revelation is capable of expressing.

In an attempt to analyse the political structures in Revelation, I would focus on three areas within the text. The first step would be a comparison between Romans 13 and Revelation 13 and the radical different response urged to governing authorities. Secondly, a close look at political structures that form part of an evil political world system with all its socio-economic consequences and its subsequent destruction would facilitate an interpretation of the extent to which modern governing authorities are in conflict with God’s divine authority. Finally, a glimpse

of the eternal state envisioned would give us an insight unto the ultimate divine political structures presided over by the Sovereign Lord himself.

- *The Evil Political Structures of Revelation 13*

The political structures of Romans 13 project an image of good government structures, pursuing the ultimate good and punishing evil and as such they are ordained by God to fulfill their noble functions. This in turn demands total submission from Christians in their relations with such a state. Yoder contrasts the political structures of Romans 13, as representative of the good state, to that of Revelation 13 as representative of “the evil state which glorifies itself religiously and must be resisted”, in an attempt to guide Christians in their response to either of these political ideologies (1972: 202). While he accepts that there are no biblical grounds for his views, Yoder encourages Christians to evaluate the nature of the state and if orderly, such as described in Romans 13, it should be supported. If on the other hand it represents an evil state as symbolised in Revelation 13, it should be opposed.

The description of the beast in Revelation 13 as part leopard, part bear and part lion is similar to the apocalyptic vision in Daniel 7:4-6. Scholars generally agree that the image of the beast in Revelation 13 represents the evil political structures of the world. Initially applied to Rome during the early centuries of Christianity, this view has been expanded to include political structures under the present dispensation. John Phillips describes the beast as “both an emperor and empire” in reference to the Roman Empire (1974: 174). Tenney accepts the reference in Romans 13: 7 as a description of Roman political authority under the Emperors (1985: 383). Michael Williams equates the Roman quest for loyalty, total obedience and worship as finding expression in the beast of Revelation 13 for John, the seer (1989:88). The Roman attempts at self-deification lay at the root of Christian opposition and their subsequent persecution. Quoting from Cullman’s, *The State in the New Testament*, Beasley-Murray states the following “... The Roman state remained continuously, up to the time of Constantine, a satanic power. The author of the Johannine Apocalypse saw with astonishing acumen that the satanic element in the Roman Empire lay in this deification” (1974: 212).

In his application of the image of the beast, “not only as a real person (but) a representative person” representing totalitarian political structures, Phillips describes the close relationship that exists between a state and its head of state as characteristic of these states. Heywood gives us a description of totalitarian regimes as “an all encompassing system of political rule that is typically established by pervasive ideological manipulation and open terror and brutality” (1997: 27). The development of totalitarian states was promoted by people such as Machiavelli and the philosopher Hegel. Machiavelli’s *The Prince*, published in 1513 served as motivational reading for dictators such as Mussolini and Hitler. Acknowledging the impact of *The Prince* on his life Machiavelli was said to have remarked that “The State is God, and Machiavelli is his prophet” (1974: 175). The

objective of a totalitarian state is the assumption of total power, the politicisation of every aspect of Social and personal existence as well as the abolition of civil society (Heywood 1997: 27). Generally as a one-party state, led by a single charismatic and all powerful leader and exercising a terroristic policing style with state control of the entire economic spectrum, totalitarian states claim for themselves some divine right of existence. Fascist Italy, Nazi Germany, Soviet Russia and Communist China are 20th century examples of the kind of totalitarian states that Phillips regards as representative of the beast in Revelation 13. The German philosopher Hegel's writings are credited with the development of the modern totalitarian state. He describes the state as the final and absolute authority, embodying "all social and ethical ideals" with no moral integrity required in its relations with other states. These principals, according to Phillips, assisted and guided states such as Communist Russia and Nazi Germany.

Through lies and deception the beast will influence the world to the extent that he secures a period of false peace and commands the worship of the world. Phillips describes his purposes as fourfold, i.e. defying the Sovereign Lord, destroying God's saints, dominating the nations of the earth and deluding the masses. The beast will be accompanied by a false prophet that will assist him to achieve his objectives. The false prophet will present a new religion to Man that will ultimately channel worship to Satan. His dynamic appeal "will lie in his skill in combining political expediency with religious passion, self-interest with benevolent philanthropy, lofty sentiment with blatant sophistry, moral platitude with unbridled self-indulgence" and arguing in a "subtle, convincing and appealing manner" (Phillips 1974: 182).

Phillips made an interesting point in 1974 that "a deceptive peace will settle upon the world after the collapse of Russia and the brilliant power play of the beast." (1974: 178). The collapse of communism between 1989 and 1991 ushered in a new political world order that assured the United States as the only superpower in the world capable of policing international crisis. Whether this will have the desired effect for good remains to be seen. On the other hand, could this be the "deceptive peace" that Phillips referred to? The political structure of Revelation 13 therefore represents a totalitarian regime, modeled on the ancient Roman Empire with a political ideology based on lies, deception, brutal suppression and self-deification. The strong symbolism in the text vividly portrays the impending evil that is no doubt in the process of enveloping the world. As dramatic as the manner in which this political structure is manifested, even more dramatic, describes the seer of the Apocalypse, would be the response from God to ensure the ultimate triumph of good over evil.

- *Destruction of an Evil World System*

Babylon plays a major role in the evil political structures of the world in terms of the book of Revelation. In chapter 14 verse 8 an angel announces the doom of Babylon. Two major events in the Old Testament are associated with Babylon,

namely the incident at Babel as an organised human rebellion against God (Gen. 11: 3-9) and king Nebuchadnezzar's destruction of Jerusalem and the exile of the Jews. Wickedness such as idolatry, sacrilegious feasting, cruelty and arrogance has made Babylon renowned for her transgressions and opposition to God's will. The symbolism and imagery with regard to Babylon is represented as both a religious and political system according to Phillips. He describes the relations between the two systems as follows: "In the beginning, the religious system supports the political system, but in the end the political system supplants the religious one" (1974: 221). Chapter 17 describes the Babylonian mother as a religious system, controlled by the beast and that paves the way for the political system that is subsequently created by the beast. The Babylonian monster that subsequently emerges is the symbolic representation of an evil world system. Prophetically Babylon is identified with Rome (v.9) and in the New Testament has come to symbolise the persecuting Roman Empire. Others view Babylon as any sinful world empire that inspires people to sin and persecute the church.

Chapter 17 gives us some insight into the nature of this religious system by describing, five characteristics of the system (Phillips 1974: 213-220). Her unrelenting pursuit for *universal power* (Revelation 17: 1-2) is demonstrated by her influence over the nations and rulers of the world to attain that power. Phillips in true historicist style describes the papal authority as the religious system of Revelation 17. The church first tasted secular power after Constantine initiated the infamous Christian crusades and imposed Christianity as a state religion on the world empire. In that light the papal system in Rome is organised like a super state with the pope as the head of the hierarchy. The cardinals represent a form of papal senate with the departments, tribunals, offices and commissions forming the curia. The papal diplomatic corps is followed by government structures with the clergy and laity following in hierarchical order. The manifestation of power is awesome. This final religious system will certainly embrace Christianity as well as all other religions of the world. The *unique position* (Rev 17: 3) that the system holds is supported by the evil world empire that has a vested interest in the process. The *unlimited prosperity* (Rev 17: 46) of the religious system is symbolised by her arraignment "in purple and scarlet colour, and decked with gold and precious stones and pearls," (v.17: 4a). Phillips describes the wealth of the Vatican in 1974 as around 70 billion USD. As an international financial powerhouse, it is certainly one of the major forces to be reckoned with. The Vatican wealth clearly exceeds the wealth of other religious systems. The *unholy passions* (17: 4b-5) of the religious system is demonstrated very strongly in its idolatrous worship and immortality. Beasley-Murray's description is quite apt: "The empire embraced a multitude of forms of idolatry, not the least of which were Rome's own claims to be divine" (1974: 252). The imagery of moral filthiness is a description of the large scale moral decay that has set in around the church. The church in America has been rocked by scandals of major sexual abuse within its ranks recently. There is no doubt that this is not limited to America only, but is happening all over the world including South Africa and

involving a number of other churches as well. The *untold persecutions* (17: 6) that result from this religious system and witnessed by John left him “astonished beyond measure” (Phillips 1974: 220). The persecution of Christians by an evil empire such as Rome is one thing, but persecution by a religious system is quite another. Phillips cites the inquisitions by Torquemada, as the first Inquisitor General in 1483, resulting in the deaths of around ten thousand people with another eight thousand perishing at the hands of his successors. Based on this religious approach, the evil political structure will emerge (17: 7-11) as a dominant force in world politics. This will be manifested in political and economic unions under the delusion of a better world. Political alliances for economic expediency will become the order of the day.

The reasons for the destruction of symbolic Babylon are recorded in Revelation 18: 1-8. As the centre of Satan’s political headquarters, the city of Babylon, we are told will house demons and foul spirits. As much as the old Babylon was home to “magicians, soothsayers, and astrologers who were official counsellors of the king, ... today’s reviving cults of satanism, spiritism, occultism, witchcraft and astrology will gravitate towards Babylon” (Phillips 1974: 233). The magnitude of evil and sin will serve as the basis for her destruction. The immense levels of sin and abomination would press upon God the urgency to react in a powerful and dramatic manner in order to destroy this evil political structure. God’s action will be swift and concise through plagues.

Phillips tells us that those who would be disappointed by the destruction of Babylon (18: 9-19) “are those who have profited from the city’s influence, trade, and power, from its wickedness and from its wealth. The lamenting groups include those rulers who have been closely allied to this evil political structure, those international traders who have profited financially from trading relations with this authority and those mariners who had docked at the ports of this awesome authority and had also profited financially. The vivid imagery of this destruction is recorded in Revelation 18: 21-24. Not only is the destruction of the evil political structure of the antichristian empire accompanied by grief and lament, but it also triggers off great excitement (Revelation 18:20). The immense delight in heaven, at the fall of Satan and the antichristian empire is described in Revelation 19: 1-6. The hallelujah songs that are sung to God praising his severity, sovereignty and supremacy are a testimony of the long awaited triumph of good over evil. This victory over the antichristian establishment ushers in the golden millennium of Christian peaceful rule before the final destruction of Satan (20: 9b-10).

- *The Ultimate Political Dispensation*

In Revelation 21:9 - 22:5 we find a description of the eternal state as the final political dispensation. This dispensation is ushered in after the destruction of Babylon, the millennium rule of peace with Satan bound the final destruction of Satan and the great judgement. Revelation 20: 11-12 describes the setting of God’s

great white throne as He sits in judgement. Rev 20: 13 describes that frightening moment when men will be called to account and for those who fall short of God's requirements, their names not written in the Lamb's Book of Life (Revelation 20: 14 - 15) will be final. They will be cast into the lake of fire. With this action God himself closes the book on the evil socio-political and religious conduct of humanity Chapter 21:1 - 8 gives us a description of this new eternal state.

This new political dispensation boasts a number of characteristics worth mentioning. Everything about this dispensation is brand new boasting a new creation, a new capital, a new community and a new constitution (Phillips 1974: 263 - 267). The opening verse of chapter 1, in the first place, confirms this dispensation as an entirely new creation. The heavy infiltration of evil in the worldly political system and Satan's influence over both spheres necessitated a dramatic new approach. Out of the ashes of the old heaven and earth emerges an entirely new and God ordained creation capable of functioning very well without evil infiltration and influence. The new state has a *new capital*, the holy city, New Jerusalem (Rev 21: 2). Phillips ascribes a literal meaning to the heavens, the earth, and the sea as well as to the city of New Jerusalem. As the political centre of this new dispensation, it will function in a way that will ensure ordered governance promoting the good with one exception that there will no longer be any bad or evil to punish. Its focus would be the divine welfare of all of its citizens without racial prejudice, economic discrimination, and the greedy accumulation of wealth and the manipulation of religious sanctuary for selfish political purposes. It will be a glorified capital city.

A *new community* will occupy this state and will be blessed through the continuous presence of the Sovereign Lord. John assures us that this new community will experience an eternal blissful existence without grief. God will wipe away all tears and they will no longer experience any sorrow, death or pain. God has taken into account the suffering, pain and death of his persecuted people and now rewards their diligence and loyalty with a glorified state. A new political structure that this world has never experienced before emerges and develops unblemished. The pain and suffering experienced under various political structures will make way for a divine political ideology that will ensure a glorified existence without worry. The final characteristic of this state is that in true political style it would be protected by a *new constitution*. The constitution of the eternal state will ensure that it is a wonderful place to live in. God will achieve His initial intentions he had with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. It will also ensure a satisfactory environment with plentiful resources to meet all its inhabitants' needs. Through the satisfying resources that will be provided, the constitution will ensure satisfying responses as those who have overcome will inherit all things. Satisfying relationships will be ensured through God's promise: "And I will be his God, and he shall be my son." The final guarantee by the constitution is that the new state will be a safe place to live in as the fearful, abominable, murderers, whoremongers, sorcerers, idolaters and liars shall be in the lake of fire

experiencing their second death. Even the best modern constitutions in the world fall far short of God's divine requirements. I personally favour liberal democratic regimes that ensure the individual freedoms of its people are encoded in a constitution. These regimes by nature also have the effect of opening the door to such evil practices as abortion, prostitution, pornography, etc. By guaranteeing the freedom of religion, all forms of cultic beliefs are allowed to proliferate within the system. According to Phillips, "the best-conceived constitutions are foiled by the sinfulness of man."

7. A Modern Application

The above survey of political ideology in the Bible gave us some insight into the socio-political background and political structures of selected biblical communities spanning both the Old and the New Testaments. I would like to address, in this section, the ambivalence we experience as Christians and the reconciliation of politics and religion in our modern environment within the context of our Christian socio-political responsibility and conduct as well as the conduct and responsibilities of the governing authorities.

7.1 Reconciliation of Politics and Religion

The feeling of ambivalence we experience in our faith as Christians when we deal with socio-political issues, hamper our ability to reconcile politics and religion in our collective Christian psyche. As a result we are at times confused as to what our Christian responsibilities and conduct should be. Ambivalence is defined by *The Concise Oxford Dictionary* as “coexistence in one person of the emotional attitudes of love and hate, or other opposite feelings, towards the same object or situation” (1982: 27). As Christians we are confronted with political reality on a daily basis. Our social and political attitudes are shaped from early childhood and become a product of our family upbringing, social and political environment.

Christian religious ideology revolves around the monumental struggle between good and evil that have become such powerful internal forces within us as human beings. The ambivalence that we experience is manifested in our simultaneous attempts to put as much distance between ourselves and God while expressing an emptiness or void that yearns for spiritual fulfillment. In his book, *The Compact Guide to World Religions*, Dean Halverson points out that “the religious urge within humanity is what sets us apart from the rest of the created order... At the same time, though, while we have this religious urge, each person is spiritually torn; within us are two conflicting kinds of reactions to God. On the one hand, we are drawn to Him, but, on the other hand, we want to run away from him. One person had labelled such a malady as ‘spiritual schizophrenia’” (1996:16). It is this spiritual battle within each of us that gives rise to spiritually ambivalent feelings such as love and hate, good and evil, fear and courage and humility and pride. The extent to which we can arrest and develop those positive aspects of our ambivalent feelings, will determine whether or not we are living within God’s divine will. On the other hand, if we feed the rebellious side of our “spiritual schizophrenia” we find ourselves in opposition to God’s divine will. As a result we embrace evil and find ourselves rebelling against God’s moral authority. This rebellion is manifested in the collective evil that pervades the world system of government that is described in Revelation.

A further expression of this ambivalence is found in our political views as Christians. This is the result of our exposure to a particular form of political ideology and indoctrinated through our family structures and social environment. While the text of Romans 13:1-7 were traditionally used to condemn all forms of

civil disobedience, the modern view is for right-wing Christians to deny others the right to protest, strike and exercise civil disobedience in general. They would therefore tend to promote “quite and respectful servitude” while left-wing Christians would use the prophets of the Old Testament and passages such as Revelation 13 to justify civil disobedience and even revolution (Williams 1989: 79). The Christian faith today is certainly characterised by a sharp division between Christian fundamentalism as is practiced in the United States of America and the Liberation and Black Theology movements that emerged in Latin America and Africa. Both make a claim to God’s divine authority in their Christian conduct.

Great Christians from history are credited with championing the causes of social concern. Stott describes John Wesley as not only a preacher of the gospel, but “a prophet of social righteousness” (1999:4). Wesley played a major role in the Evangelical Revival which confronted the social evils of eighteenth century Europe and America. The spiritual and social success of this revival led to the abolishment of the slave trade, the humanization of prison systems, factory and mine conditions and the availability of education to a wider society. John Wesley is therefore described by Stott as “the man who restored to a nation its soul.” (1994: 4). Like Wesley there were numerous Christian individuals and groups such as “the Clapham sect,” William Wilberforce, Anthony Ashley Cooper, Charles G. Finney and others who worked tirelessly to not only spread the gospel but also to ensure social reform. The early part of the twentieth century saw a reversal with a renewed focus on the gospel and a lack of concern for social issues. One of the important reasons that Christians have been unable to reconcile politics and religion is the view that politics is generally considered to be a dirty business. Strong arguments have since been advanced for the disassociation of politics and religion. It was also not uncommon for conservative Christians under apartheid to promote the view that politics and religion does not mix while they viewed the civil disobedience and protests headed by Archbishop Desmond Tutu and other clerics and Christians as misplaced. Many times we allow the nature of our political views to dictate our Christian socio-political involvement. Where we support a political status-quo, we view suspiciously any Christian protest, irrespective of the biblical justification for such protests. The Evangelical fellowship of South Africa (EFSA) issued a document entitled *The Bible and Socio-Political Action: A study Guide for Christians facing issues in South Africa* in 1989 in which it posed the following question: “Do Evangelical Christians have a God-given responsibility to be involved in socio-political activity?” They content that many evangelical Christians would in all probably react negatively to the question of involvement. The reasons advanced for this attitude would be that:

- 1) Jesus sees His Kingdom as not of this world.
- 2) There is a clear distinction between the governments role to order society and the Christian’s duty to pray and obey.
- 3) Politics is regarded as a dirty business. Andrew Heywood, in describing the attitude to politics, states that the word “politics” is regarded as a “dirty” word

as “it conjures up images of trouble, disruption and even violence on the one hand, and deceit, manipulation and lies on the other.” (1997: 4). This view has prevailed over a long period of time. Henry Adams, a US historian from the nineteenth century described politics as “the systematic organisation of hatreds.”

In his secular approach Heywood attempts to redefine politics as a “valuable, even laudable, activity” (1997: 4).

- 4) The Christian’s primary focus should be evangelism and not detract from that.
- 5) As Christians we should only seek to influence the government on social evils such as abortion, pornography, gambling, drinking and communism.

Clause 5 of the Lausanne Covenant, drawn up in Switzerland in 1974 and which forms the basis for the above discussion document, confirmed the reconciliation of politics and religion in the clause which reads as follows: “We affirm that God is both the Creator and the Judge of all men. We therefore share his concern for justice and reconciliation throughout human society and for the liberation of men from every kind of oppression. Because mankind is made in the image of God, every person, regardless of race, religion, colour, culture, class, sex or age, has an intrinsic dignity because of which he should be respected and served, not exploited. Here too we express penitence both for our neglect and for having sometimes regarded evangelism and social concern as mutually exclusive. Although reconciliation with man is not reconciliation with God, or social action evangelism, nor is politic liberation salvation, nevertheless we affirm that evangelism and socio-political involvement are both part of our Christian duty. For both are necessary expressions of our doctrines of God and man, our love for our neighbour and our obedience to Christ. The message of salvation implies also a message of judgement upon every form of alienation, oppression and discrimination, and we should not be afraid to denounce evil and injustice wherever they exist. When people receive Christ they are born again into His Kingdom and must seek not only to exhibit but also to spread His righteousness in the midst of an unrighteousness world. The salvation we claim should be transforming us in the totality of our personal and social responsibilities. Faith without works is dead” (EFSA 1989: 1, 2). The Lausanne Covenant is an attempt by the evangelical church to refocus on socio-political issues.

A reconciliation of politics and religion is only possible if we clearly understand our biblical mandate in that regard. The infusion of religion in the political life of the ancient Israelites gave them a distinct political ideology that called for civil disobedience when their religious values were threatened. Those religious values found expression in the socio-political milieu making reconciliation between politics and religion absolutely necessary and a vital part of our current Christian conduct.

7.2 *Christian Socio-Political Responsibility and Conduct*

The New Testament concept of Christian socio-political responsibility requires careful consideration of the moral response of a state in the performance of its duties. The Synod of Bishops of the Church of the Province of Southern Africa concluded their analysis of the implications of Romans 13 by emphasising a number of points relating to Christian responsibility and conduct. Firstly the Christian is responsible for his conduct primarily to God and this relationship cannot be interfered with by any governing authority making conflicting claims. Secondly the individual has an obligation to honour both the State as well as the officials of the state irrespective of the conduct of the officials. The New Testament view supports Christians as human beings ordered by the divine will of God. As such their conduct should at all times be an ordered approach, rejecting any form of lawlessness. Civil obedience is especially critical when the performance of a State is clearly in the will of God or at the very least does not stand in conflict with it. Thirdly, the New Testament places an obligation on a citizen to exercise civil disobedience "where his obedience to God would be compromised by not disobeying the State." In this the Christian should be guided by individual conscience. This conscientious disobedience, involving issues of substance and not trivia, can be seen to enhance the honour a citizen bestows on the State. This is relevant in the sense that opposition is against the corruption of State rather than its performance in terms of God's divine will. (Synod of Bishop 1983: 7, 8). The cultural mandate that God gives us in Genesis 1: 28 is largely neglected in Christian circles (Marshall 1984: 20). God's instruction to humanity to develop culture, science and society on the earth is almost treated casually as we have placed more emphasis on the Gospel mandates such as Matthew 28: 19-20 in the Great Commission. Marshall argues for a balanced approach in seeing both mandates (concerning social responsibility and evangelism) as "essentially two parts of the same thing - that we are servants and followers of God through Jesus Christ in whatever we think or feel or do in any and every area of God's creation." (1984: 20). EFSA, in their paper, asserts that as "God created man firstly for fellowship with Himself (Gen. 3: 8, 9), then to be in relationship with his fellow man (Gen. 1: 28a; 2: 18) and finally to rule, subdue and tend the rest of creation (Gen. 1: 28)," God will hold us responsible for the management of the planet and its resources. This makes socio-political involvement in the process critical. I do not recall that any Christian organisation may have been invited as delegates to the World Summit on Sustainable Development currently underway in Johannesburg. While the summit would certainly fall within God's cultural mandate to manage our natural resources, it would have been an appropriate forum for Christians to help focus on the event as a necessary process encompassed by God's divine will. The Christian's political tasks and socio-political involvement encompasses his "responsibility for the direction of human life and culture" (Marshall 1984: 38).

EFSA underscores the Christians responsibility to support the governing authorities in those areas that clearly fall within the domain of God's divine purposes. In that light Christians would submit to it in honour (Rom. 13: 1, 5; 1

Pet. 2: 13, 17), pray for it (1 Tim. 2: 1 - 4), pay their taxes (Mk. 5: 13 - 17; Rom. 13: 6) and live in freedom pursuing good (1 Pet. 2: 16, 17; Rom. 12: 2; 13: 3). Political awareness is essential if we, as Christians are to fulfill God's purposes on the earth. Church involvement in politics should involve the teaching of the principles of justice as contained in Scripture. It should however avoid aligning itself with a particular political party or ideology thereby "remaining in a position to minister to all groups" (EFSA 1989: 20). While a Christian is expected to obey the governing authorities, there would be occasions when civil disobedience is absolutely necessary for a Christian. An interesting perspective to consider is the Christian support for the forceful removal of a government. President Clinton, as representative of a Christian nation and the free world, is seriously considering the removal of Saddam Hussein as leader of the Iraqi people. Hussein is accused of harbouring and supporting terrorist groups and he is also suspected of manufacturing weapons of mass destruction. The world seems to be divided on whether or not to support America on their views. Considering the massive damage inflicted on various nations represented at the World Trade Centre, the Al Queda terrorist organisation together with the network of States that support it most certainly fall within the biblical definition of evil. Christians in seeking guidance on the matter should consider that God would support the overthrow of a corrupt government (Amos 1 & 2) on the one hand while on the other Jesus did not support the removal of unjust government by force. He refused to support the cause of the freedom fighters of his time. A solution for Christians would be to consistently seek peaceful means to resolve major political problems. There is a distinct blessing awaiting them in that regard: "*Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called the sons of God*" (Matthew 5: 9).

7.3 Government Responsibility and Conduct

Governments are ordained by God to rule in a just manner pursuing the ultimate good. In that sense it derives the necessary authority from God. Marshall points out that the maintenance of a just political order is the responsibility of the people within that order. He refers to it as "communal authority and responsibility" (1984: 64). Describing the type of government that God requires, EFSA highlights the concern that God had for all aspects of Israelite life when He ruled them directly. As a righteous God, He orders a society in keeping with His righteous character. Yahweh's concern included food and health (Lev. 11 - 13), sanitation (Deut. 23: 12 - 14), employment (Deut. 24: 6), economic policy (Deut. 15: 1 - 11) and safety regulations (Deut. 22: 8). His socio-political concerns also extended to the protection of the powerless, the under-privileged and foreigners with justice and compassion forming the basis of these concerns.

Concluding their study on the socio-political implications of Romans 13, the Synod of Bishops of the Church of the Province of Southern Africa made the following points with regard to the State's responsibilities and conduct in terms of God's divine purpose (1983: 7):

- 1) In the same way that the individual's primary obligation is to God, the State's primary obligation is also to God.
- 2) A State would gradually lose its moral authority over its citizens once its policies are in conflict with God's divine purposes.
- 3) The Bishops also assert that by implication, Romans 13: 4 put every facet of government's political structure under obligation to God. These would include all matters pertaining to the legislative, executive, judicial, military, administrative and bureaucratic functions of the State. A further obligation on the part of the high level organs of the State is to ensure that all officials, including those of lower rank are firmly entrenched in God's divine purposes in the fulfillment of their duties.

As important as it is for Christians to understand God's purpose in their socio-political existence, it is also important for a governing authority to understand God's purpose for government. An understanding, acceptance and focus on God's purpose will ensure that governments act as His servants and thereby separate themselves very clearly from the evil world system. By "serving the people and not lording it over them (Mk. 10: 42, 43), ruling justly (2 Sam. 23: 3, 4; Ps. 72: 1, 2), with an impartial and incorruptible legal system (Deut. 16: 18 - 20), providing conditions that will be conducive to living peaceable and quiet lives (1 Tim. 2: 2), encouraging those who do good and punishing the wrong-doer (Rom. 13: 4, 5; 1 Pet. 2: 14) and collecting taxes for the administering of the state (Mk. 12: 13 - 17; Rom. 13: 6, 7)", governments acquire moral authority to govern. Given the levels of crime in our country, personal enrichment through fraud and massive abuse of public resources, a spirit of entitlement and a relaxed attitude with regard to prostitution and the possibility of its legalisation and abortion clearly does not give the South African government moral authority over its citizens. There is an almost deafening silence as far as Christian protest is concerned. This apathy is clearly in conflict with God's requirement of civil disobedience under these circumstances. There is a host of socio-political issues that influences a government's public responsibility. Some of these issues include economics, welfare, taxation, international relations and the nuclear arms race. The list can be extended quite significantly. Taxation under the Roman imperial state was corrupt, burdensome and very oppressive on its people. While the State has the right to collect taxes in terms of Mark 12 and Romans 13, the system should be fair and not burdensome on its citizens. Taxation should not be a tool for economic exploitation and oppression but should be utilised to facilitate State function and promote the welfare of all its citizens especially the under-privileged and the poor who seem to occupy a special place in God's heart. Failure to recognise this divine calling will relegate a governing authority to a position in the evil world system that will ultimately be destroyed by God.

8. Conclusion

The political ideology of the Bible is quite specific. It commands obedience to the will of God by both governments and Christians in their political conduct. Political conduct is so important that “the Bible spends more time talking about political doings than it does about charismatic gifts, or the return of Christ ... the Scripture speaks to us continuously, incessantly and unremittingly about justice and politics” (Marshall 1984: 66, 67). The nature of modern socio-political issues demands a clear and unambiguous response from Christians. Biblical clarity on these issues is not easily achievable because “clarity has as much to do with the reader as it does with the text” (Marshall 1984: 67). Where the Bible seems to be unclear on some issues, as will generally happen, we may follow Marshall’s advice to “continually, persistently and unrelentingly struggle to understand and follow its message” (1984: 67). If we develop a Christian framework for understanding politics, we would be in a position to reconcile politics and religion as a God directed purpose to ensure His divine standard on earth. Our feelings of ambivalence will make way for a positive Christian conduct which would direct our Christian responsibilities. Only then can we fully appreciate the Great Commission (Matthew 28: 19 - 20) as God’s call for our involvement in making this world a better place socio-politically. The more people that subscribe to God’s standard of political conduct will result in greater opposition to the dark and evil forces of this world with a corresponding elimination of large-scale human suffering as we have witnessed in the 20th century.

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